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A Night Corner

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A TIGHT CORNER

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SAMUEL FRENCH, 24 WEST 22D STREET, NEW YORK CITY

A TIGHT CORNER

A FARCICAL COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By

HERBERT SWEARS

Author of "The Whirlpool," "The House of Clay," "Hero and Heroine," "The Nonsensor," "Home, Sweet Home, with Variations," "Twilight," "Wayfarers," "The Mere Man," "Such is Fame," "Two on a 'Bus," "Love and Dentistry," "Semi-detached," "Pansy," "Too Many Cooks," "Lady Interviewer," "Day Dreams," "Cupid Astray," etc

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GIFT OF
ROBERT GOULD SHAW
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A TIGHT CORNER

First produced by Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, at the Theatr Royal, Portsmouth, on Wednesday, May 9, 1906.

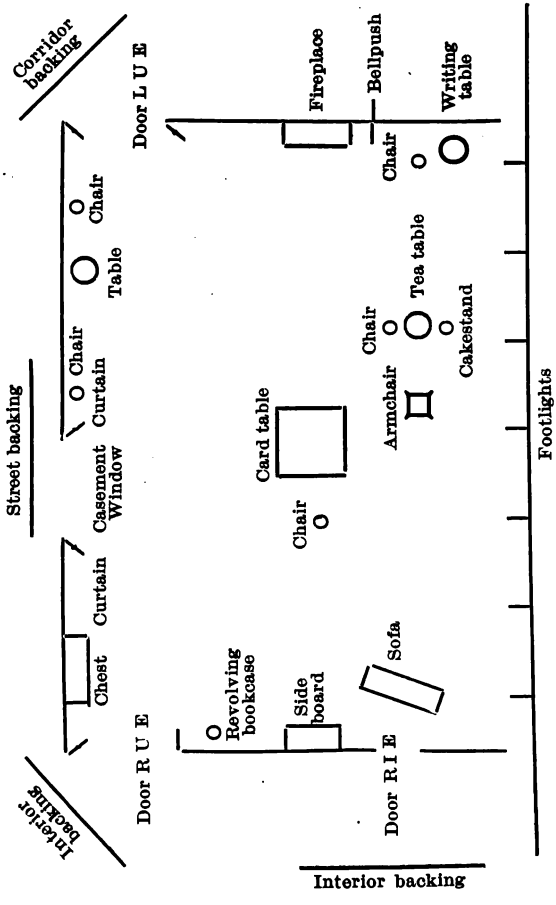
CHARACTERS

JACK HYACYNTH	*Mr. Kendal.*
SAMSON QUAYLE	*Mr. Ernest Hendrie*
BARRINGTON SKEWS	*Mr. Metcalfe Wood.*
MRS. PERTWEE	*Miss Jessie Moore.*
CLARA	*Miss Marie Löhr.*
and	
MRS. HYACYNTH	*Mrs. Kendal.*

THE SCENE *is laid in the drawing-room of the Hyacynths' flat i Mount Street, Berkeley Square.*

ACT I. *An afternoon in June.*
ACT II. *Evening of the same day.*
ACT III. *The next morning.*

SCENE PLOT


Corridor backing
Door L U E
Fireplace
Bellpush
Writing table
Chair
Chair
Table
Chair
Tea table
Chair
Cakestand
Street backing
Curtain
Casement Window
Card table
Armchair
Footlights
Chair
Chest
Curtain
Revolving bookcase
Side board
Sofa
Interior backing
Door R U E
Door R I E
Interior backing

FURNITURE PLOT

Oak chest. Writing-table. Sofa. Small tea-table. Cake-stand. Sideboard. Revolving book-case. Small table. Five chairs. One small armchair. Fireplace, fender and fire-irons. Mantelpiece and looking-glass. Clock and ornaments on mantelpiece. Electric bell push to ring. Cushions for sofa. 2 curtains for sash window. Coverings for tables. Flowering plants to fill in fireplace. Good carpet down.

PROPERTY PLOT

Act I.

Ready off L.U.E.: Tea-pot with hot tea, and jug with hot water, on small salver. Ready off R.U.E.: Small tray with whisky decanter, a syphon and 2 tumblers, a motor-horn, and motor sounds. Ready for prompter, electric bell. On tea-table L.C.: 5 tea-cups, 5 saucers, 5 tea-spoons, sugar basin, with sugar and tongs, milk in jug. In cake-stand a plum cake, and a dish of fancy biscuits. A knife to cut cake. On writing table: Ink, pens, paper and envelopes, a silver cigarette box with cigarettes, ash tray, match-stand, and in a drawer, a pack of cards and 2 bridge-markers. On table up L.C. at back, an ash-tray and match-stand. On mantelpiece, Mrs. Hyacynth's latch-key, also clock and china. Inside oak chest a thick rug and several cushions.

Act II.

Ready off L.U.E.: Tin of insect death, two green baize aprons for carmen, kitchen basin, and china crash. Ready off R.U.E.: Hand-organ. On sideboard: Tantalus with whisky, 6 tumblers and a syphon, plum cake, and dish of fancy biscuits. 2 novels on table C. Letters for Hyacynth and Mrs. Pertwee.

Act III.

Ready off L.U.E.: *The Family Doctor*. Furniture catalogue for Skews. On table C., a book and vase of cut flowers. Books in book-case, or on sideboard. Tantalus and liqueur glass on sideboard. Cigarettes on writing-table.

Any costumes, wigs or properties required in the production of "A Tight Corner," can be hired or purchased reasonably from Messrs. C. H. Fox, Ltd., 27, Wellington Street, Strand, Londo

A TIGHT CORNER

ACT I.

SCENE.—*Drawing-room of the Hyacynths' flat in Mount Street, Berkeley Square, W. A very handsome interior, tastefully furnished. Sash window overlooking street* C. *at back. Long silk curtains to drape window. A fireplace* L. *Door leading to dining-room* R.U.E. *Door leading to bedroom* R.I.E. *Main entrance* L.U.E. *A card-table, covered with a cloth, is placed a little up* C. *Small chair* R. *of it. No chair* L. *of it. Writing-table and chair extreme* L. *To* R. *of it and rather above it, very small tea-table, with tray, on which are set five tea-cups, milk jug, and sugar basin. Chair above tea-table. Quite small armchair* R. *of it. Care should be taken that there is a clear passage-way between the armchair and the card-table up* C. *A wicker-work cake-stand below tea table. Sofa with cushions* R. *Sideboard* R. *A small table up* L. *A small chair on either side of it. Against flat, extreme* R. *at back, between window* C., *and the* R.U.E., *is a handsome black oak chest. Between door* R.U.E. *and sideboard, a small revolving book-case. Electric bell push below fireplace. Hangings, bric-à-brac, ornaments, cabinets everywhere.*

(*At Curtain rise, the stage is empty. Enter* CLARA, *showing in* MR. BARRINGTON SKEWS, *a very smart young man of twenty-five. He is extremely well-*

groomed and his clothes are faultlessly cut. His boots are of patent leather, with dove-coloured tops.)

CLARA. I will tell Mrs. Hyacynth you are here, sir.

SKEWS (*moving to fireplace,* L.). Thank you.

(CLARA *crosses at back and exits* R.I.E. SKEWS *puts tall hat and gloves on small table up* L. *and then arranges tie in front of mirror.*)

(*Re-enter* CLARA R.I.E.)

CLARA. Mrs. Hyacynth is coming, sir.

SKEWS. Thank you.

(CLARA *passes round at back and exits* L.U.E. SKEWS *once more arranges his cravat at the looking-glass.*)

(*Enter* MRS. HYACYNTH R.I.E. *She is an extremely attractive woman of about thirty—with a delightful smile, and very happy laughing eyes. She is essentially a good sort; rather mischievous and full of fun, but with a heart of gold. She is beautifully dressed for the afternoon. Round her neck she wears a long chain of beads, with which she frequently toys.*

MRS. H. (*as she enters*). Hullo, Billy!

(*He turns and crosses to her. They meet below card-table,* C.)

Oh! what a dream of a tie!

SKEWS. You *really* think so, Mrs. Jack?

MRS. H. Of course I do!

SKEWS. Do you like my boots? (*shews them.*)

MRS. H. *Rather*—sweet!

SKEWS. They're your boots, you know.

MRS. H. Mine!

SKEWS. I mean I always wear boots with dove-coloured tops when I come to see you.

MRS. H. (*crosses and sits in armchair* R. *of tea-table*). Thank you, Billy. That's very thoughtful of you.

After allowing MRS. HYACYNTH *to cross in front of him,* SKEWS *follows, and sits on chair above tea-table.*)

SKEWS. Mrs. Jack!

MRS. H. Yes.

SKEWS (*sits*). I've something awfully important to say to you.

MRS. H. Have you?

(*Enter* CLARA *with hot water and teapot* L.U.E.)

SKEWS. Yes—it's—it's—— (*sees* CLARA *and stops.*) Oh!

MRS. H. Billy, you're much too young to have secrets. So tell me all about it—quickly!

(CLARA *places teapot and hot water jug on tray.*)

SKEWS. I want to most awfully, but—— (*glances round at* CLARA, *who exits* L.U.E.)

MRS. H (*pours out tea*). Well?

SKEWS. You see it's not—(*glancing round at door*) it's not a thing one can speak of before servants.

MRS. H. You're very mysterious, Billy. Come now?

SKEWS (*softly*). Mrs. Jack!

MRS. H. Yes?

SKEWS. I love you!

MRS. H. (*laughing in the most good-natured way*). Oh! Billy—please! (*hands tea-cup.*)

SKEWS (*very seriously*). Don't laugh. I'm in deadly earnest. You're the only woman in the world!

MRS. H. I wish I *were!*

SKEWS (*surprised*). Eh?

MRS. H. (*smiling*). I *would* have a good time.

SKEWS. Don't rot, Mrs. Jack. I tell you I love you most awfully.

MRS. H. My dear boy, I admire your good taste. Go *on* loving me. I'm quite safe.

SKEWS. Safe?

MRS. H. Perfectly safe.

SKEWS (*bitterly*). You mean you don't care!

MRS. H. I like you very much, Billy.

SKEWS (*gratified*). Ah!

MRS. H. I admire your ties.

SKEWS (*pleased*). Ah!

MRS. H. And your collars.

SKEWS (*pleased*). Ah!

MRS. H. And your boots.

SKEWS (*pleased*). Ah!

MRS. H. You're a nice clean well-groomed boy; and I'm fond of nice clean well-groomed boys.

SKEWS. Boys!

MRS. H. I spoke in the plural!

SKEWS. Then I have a rival?

MRS. H. Many. I expect a few will be turning up shortly.

SKEWS. Here?

MRS. H. This is my day, you know.

SKEWS (*crestfallen*). Oh!

MRS. H. Samson Quayle is coming, I know.

SKEWS. Who's he?

MRS. H. (*laughs*). A very dull solicitor. He bores me stiff. But he's an old college friend of Jack's, so I have to be civil to him.

SKEWS. I don't mind *him*.

MRS. H. He's quite unattractive. He doesn't approve of me at all.

SKEWS. How dare he!

MRS. H. Oh! you needn't look ferocious. I can always squash him if I want to.

SKEWS. Any one else?

MRS. H. Probably Mrs. Pertwee from the flat above.

SKEWS. I don't mind *her*.

MRS. H. She will come in the hope of meeting Jack. She adores Jack. The funny thing is that Jack can't stand her.

SKEWS. Is she pretty?

MRS. H. Oh! she's floppy, nervy and all that sort of thing. She is also rather a cat.

SKEWS. Is any one else coming?

MRS. H. (*lightly*). Don't know.

SKEWS. Mrs. Jack!

MRS. H. Well?

SKEWS. Are you sure you don't love me?

MRS. H. Quite.

SKEWS (*rises and moves down* L.). Then there's only one thing for me to do.

MRS. H. What?

SKEWS (*crosses* R.). Blow out my brains.

MRS. H. Don't—have some cake! (*rises and moves to below cake-stand and cuts a huge slice of cake, which she holds out on the end of a knife*).

SKEWS (*moves away*). You're rather unkind!

MRS. H. (*holding out cake*). Billy! (*sternly*) Billy!

(SKEWS *hesitates—finally he takes the proffered cake and meekly sits down* R. *of tea-table.*)

That's right; and let your brains alone.

SKEWS. What's a fellow to do?

MRS. H. You're having a lovely time. You're taking me out to dinner to-night, and then to the theatre afterwards. Think how nice *that* will be for you (*sits above tea-table*).

SKEWS. Ah! yes, but you don't realize how much I love you.

MRS. H. Oh yes, I do! A great many boys love me. Some threaten to blow out their brains.

SKEWS. Ah!

MRS. H. But they never do it, fortunately.

SKEWS. Oh!

MRS. H. I will be frank with you, Billy. Shall I?

SKEWS. Go on.

MRS. H. Well, I think it much better for you boys to fall in love with me than with some horrid designing creature who might marry you and spoil your lives. Mind you, I don't say that sometimes I don't get quite fond of you——

SKEWS (*springing up*). Ah!

MRS. H. Sit down, Billy. If you spring about like that, your tie will get out of curl.

SKEWS (*sits*). Oh! (*arranges tie.*)

MRS. H. I have been momentarily expecting you to suggest that we should elope together——

SKEWS (*eagerly*). Would you? Would you?

MRS. H. Well, no. You see, in the first place my husband might object.

SKEWS. Selfish tyrant!

MRS. H. And in the second place—*I* should object.

SKEWS. You!

MRS. H. Sounds absurd, doesn't it? But the fact is, Billy, Jack and I are very much in love with one another.

SKEWS (*surprised*). Are you?

MRS. H. I suppose it *is* odd. Yet I fancy it's fairly common. The modern novel tells the world that we're very selfish and dre-a-d-fully extravagant and awfully vicious. And as people are too lazy to think for themselves, there's supposed to be a slump in morals just now. But take my word for it, Billy, we're very much as our grandmothers were, only they played whist and we play bridge.

SKEWS. Have you been married long, Mrs. Jack?

MRS. H. Oh! for years and years and years and years! and the extraordinary part of it is that Jack and I continue to grow fonder of each other. You see, Jack knows me. He often gets home late—he's a stockbroker.

SKEWS. Yes, I know.

MRS. H. Hyacynth suggests bulbs rather than stocks, doesn't it? His firm is quite respectable. The senior partner is an Irish peer. Jack hasn't met him yet, but he's considered an excellent *shot*, I believe.

SKEWS. You're left a good deal alone, then?

MRS. H. Exactly. Jack doesn't want me to mope and get hipped—that's where you boys come in.

I'm not fond of women, so the arrangement suits me perfectly.

SKEWS (*gloomily*). I understand.

MRS. H. Mr. Samson Quayle thinks I'm perfectly dre-a-dful, and Mrs. Pertwee hates me like poison.

SKEWS. Why ?

MRS. H. Well, I'm always very fit for one thing. *She's* always got neuralgia or headache or something—I put it down to liver. You see, *I'm* a cat—aren't I ?

SKEWS. No, no.

MRS. H. Oh ! yes, I am. But I'm a nice cat and I don't like nasty cats. She's always whining about not being understood. Very lucky for *her*. If some men really understood their wives they wouldn't live with them for ten minutes.

SKEWS. What sort of man is her husband ?

MRS. H. A great deal too good for *her*. Billy, I'm dying for a cigarette.

SKEWS (*rises and opens cigarette case*). Nestor ?

MRS. H. Thanks.

SKEWS (*strikes match*). I'll come and fetch you in the motor, to-night—if I may ?

MRS. H. Excellent.

SKEWS (*lights her cigarette*). What time ?

MRS. H. I suppose we ought to dine at seven ?

SKEWS. Yes, the play starts at eight.

MRS. H. How stupid. We shall have to hurry over dinner.

SKEWS. I'm afraid so.

MRS. H. Never mind, Billy, we'll have a cheery time.

SKEWS. Rather.

MRS. H. No more talk of suicide ?

SKEWS (*smilingly*). No !

MRS. H. That's right. (*rises and sits on chair at writing-table, extreme* L.). You're going to be one of my birds !

SKEWS. Birds ? (*He is standing a little above her.*)

MRS. H. Didn't you know? Jack calls this room my aviary. I have birds of all sorts, shapes and sizes. Tame birds and wild birds. Birds of rare plumage, birds without any plumage at all; song birds and silent birds; sad birds and merry birds, dull birds and bright birds. There's only one species unknown in my aviary.

SKEWS. Which is that?

MRS. H. (*innocently*). Love birds!

SKEWS. Mrs. Jack—you're a—— (*moves impulsively towards her.*)

(*Electric bell rings.*)

MRS. H. Yes, I know I am! Kindly put my cigarette down, Billy.

SKEWS (*takes cigarette*). Is that a visitor?

(MRS. H. *nods and rises.* SKEWS *throws cigarette into fireplace.*)

How rotten!

MRS. H. (*crosses* R.). Yes, my bird; but it's got to be faced. You can go on smoking.

(*Enter* CLARA, L.U.E., *shewing in* MRS. PERTWEE. MRS. PERTWEE *is somewhat thin and pale—her voice is high-pitched—her hair is continually escaping from the restraint of hairpins. She is flat-chested and her clothes hang loosely on her. She has a trick of accentuating certain words. Age rather over thirty.*)

CLARA. Mrs. Pertwee.

MRS. P. (*to* MRS. H.) *How* do you do? (*They meet between sofa and card-table.*)

(*Exit* CLARA L.U.E.)

MRS. H. How do you do, dear? Do you know Mr. Barrington Skews?

MRS. P. No, I *don't* think I do.

MRS. H. Mrs. Pertwee—Mr. Skews.

(*They bow.*)

MRS. H. You don't mind smoking, do you? (*crosses to chair above tea-table.*)

MRS. P. Oh, no! I like it. It's so dull not to smoke—my husband *never* smokes! (*sits armchair* R. *of tea-table.*)

MRS. H. Let me give you some tea, dear. (*pours out tea.*)

MRS. P. *Very* weak, please. I've just come from the Rouncebys'. Such *bad* tea, and nothing to eat. You know them, don't you?

MRS. H. Slightly. Cream and sugar?

MRS. P. *No* sugar, thanks. I *never* take sugar. Oh! *could* I have a little more water? My nerves, you know.

(MRS. H. *pours in more water.*)

Thank you *so* much! Nerves are such dreadful things. But you don't suffer, do you?

MRS. H. No, I feel quite apologetic about my health. I am always so disgustingly well. Will you try these little cakes?

(SKEWS *hands cake-stand.*)

MRS. P. They look delicious. Thank you *so* much. It's very foolish to be so highly strung, isn't it, Mr. Skews?

(*He replaces cake-stand, and stands at fireplace.*)

SKEWS. Bit of a nuisance, I should think.

MRS. P. You can't imagine what I suffer. The least *thing* jars on me. A discordant sound—a harsh voice! My husband has a particularly harsh voice.

MRS. H. Poor *dear!*

MRS. P. (*with a sigh*). It's merely my temperament. He has recently bought a gramophone—isn't he terrible?

MRS. H. I'm going to say a perfectly dre-a-dful thing.

MRS. P. (*with a little shrill laugh*). Oh ! oh ! *please* don't.

MRS. H.—I love gramophones——

(MRS. PERTWEE *throws up her hands in horror*) and barrel organs.

MRS. P. (*laughing shrilly*). Oh ! oh ! oh ! don't—don't. You make me feel quite faint.

SKEWS. I think they're rippin' !

MRS. P. (*horrified*). What shocking Philistines !

MRS. H. Shake hands, Billy. (*gives her left hand.*)

(*They laughingly shake hands.*)

MRS. P. *Can* I have a little more water—this tea is *so* strong.

MRS. H. Certainly.

(MRS. H. *fills cup with hot water.*)

MRS. P. I must say your taste in music is a little—

MRS. H. Wagnerian ?

MRS. P. No, no—a little unusual.

MRS. H. I haven't got the artistic temperament, you see.

MRS. P. True, true. My husband now, is curiously deficient in temperament.

MRS. H. Perhaps he thinks that one's enough in a flat.

MRS. P. Of course I'm very forbearing. But really, when he persists in reading the evening paper in spectacles and then falls asleep and snores, it's—(*pathetically*)—it's more than I can endure.

MRS. H. Perhaps he feels tired sometimes.

MRS. P. Good heavens, and so do I ! After a ladies' lunch party and endless calls on the top of the Royal Academy may I not feel tired too ? But *I* don't go to sleep and snore !

MRS. H. What do you do ?

MRS. P. I read Rossetti, Swinburne, Browning— —

MRS. H. Aloud ?

MRS. P. Why, yes !

MRS. H. (*with meaning*). Now I understand.

MRS. P. Then again in the morning he sometimes upsets my nerves for the whole day.

MRS. H. Indeed !

MRS. P. I'm never at my best at breakfast.

MRS. H. Who *is* ?

MRS. P. That's just it. *He* is ! He is hideously jovial. He makes—ugh !—what is called a hearty breakfast. Bacon, sausages, eggs, marmalade, two cups of coffee—but that is not the worst.

MRS. H. No ?

MRS. P. No ! He reads aloud long passages from the morning paper.

MRS. H. Good gracious !

MRS. P. He left this morning to spend three days with a married aunt at Ealing. I flatly refused to go. Imagine it ! No one in the *world* but my husband would *dream* of staying with a married aunt at Ealing !

MRS. H. I admire his courage.

MRS. P. Now *your* husband is so different.

MRS. H. Well, his relatives don't live quite so far afield.

MRS. P. He has the artistic temperament.

MRS. H. (*a little doubtfully*). M'yes.

MRS. P. I think he has a *beautiful* nature.

MRS. H. (*to* SKEWS). You mustn't listen, Billy. You'll learn too much of the joys of married life.

MRS. P. (*laughing shrilly*). Oh ! what amusing things you say !

SKEWS (*to* MRS. H.). Well, I'm afraid I must be going. I have to go round to the garage and get back to Bury Street and dress. (*moves up and gets hat from small table up* L.)

MRS. H. All right, Billy. I'll be ready punctually at a quarter to seven. (*rings bell below fireplace.*)

SKEWS (*comes down and shakes hands.*) Good-bye, Mrs. Pertwee. You might tell your husband that

"Force" is excellent for breakfast. (*goes up to door*, L.U.E.).

MRS. P. Oh, oh! don't, don't!

SKEWS (*at door*). It's very strengthening. Good-bye.

MRS. H. Au 'voir, Billy.

(*Exit* SKEWS, L.U.E.)

MRS. P. (*crosses to sofa* R.). I was *so* interested to meet Mr. Skews. I have heard such a *lot* about him.

MRS. H. (L.). He's a dear boy. I'm very fond of him.

MRS. P. You're *always* about together—aren't you? (*sits sofa.*)

MRS. H. Not exactly *always!* (*moves round back of card-table and remains above chair to* R. *of it.*)

MRS. P. Mrs. Rounceby was saying this afternoon that she *always* sees you together at Ranelagh.

MRS. H. Billy sometimes drives me down in his car.

MRS. P. She saw you having tea together last week *under the trees.*

MRS. H. (*standing at back of chair* R. *of card-table.*) Does she suggest that we ought to have *perched* on the *bough*?

MRS. P. (*laughing*). Oh! oh! you're *so* funny. And why do you call him Billy! Is it a *pet* name?

MRS. H. I call him Billy (*sits* R. *of table*) because his name is Barrington.

MRS. P. (*doubtfully*). Oh! I *see*—Mrs. Rounceby said she saw you lunching together at the Café Royal, but I'm sure she was mistaken. People are *so* much alike, aren't they?

MRS. H. (*calmly*). She was not mistaken. We had an extremely good lunch.

MRS. P. Really!

MRS. H. Why, of course. I *saw* Mrs. Rounceby —she was wearing a particularly frightful hat.

MRS. P. Indeed! She didn't mention *that*! And you're going out together again to-night?

MRS. H. That's the idea!

MRS. P. And doesn't your husband ever object?

MRS. H. (*lightly*). Oh, dear no!

MRS. P. How broad-minded of him. I don't think William would be so complaisant.

MRS. H. (*with meaning*). Ah! but you see Jack knows he can trust *me*!

MRS. P. How fortunate. Do you expect him home early this afternoon?

MRS. H. He rather shies at my "At home" days. But if he thinks there's any chance of meeting *you*, he's sure to be here.

MRS. P. I wanted to talk to your husband about my new society—"Kindred Souls."

(*Bell rings.*)

MRS. H. I expect that's he.

(*Voices are heard.*)

MRS. P. I'm *so* glad.

MRS. H. (*grimly*). He'll be pleased too! (*crosses* L. *to fireplace.*)

(*Enter* JACK HYACYNTH *and* SAMSON QUAYLE, L.U.E. HYACYNTH *is a pleasant, cheery person about thirty-eight. He is dressed very quietly and well.* QUAYLE *is about the same age, but looks much older. He has a perfectly bald head that shines like a mirror, His fringe of hair is auburn. He wears eye-glasses and has a somewhat pompous manner.* HYACYNTH *enters first, crosses at back of card-table to sofa, and shakes hands with* MRS. P.).

JACK. How do you do, Mrs. Pertwee?

MRS. P. (*who has risen at their entrance*). *How* do you do? (QUAYLE *moves down* L. *and shakes hands with* MRS. H.).

JACK (*turning to his wife*). I met Quayle on the doorstep.

MRS. H. (*to* QUAYLE). How sweet of you to come.

QUAYLE. Not at all, not at all! (*He gives a little pompous grunt—a characteristic of* MR. QUAYLE'S—*and moves to* L. *of card-table* C.)

MRS. H. (L.). Louisa, let me introduce Mr. Samson Quayle.

MRS. P. (*bows and remains at sofa*). *How* do you do? (*To* MRS. H.) Why *will* you call me by that ghastly name?

(QUAYLE *stands* L. *of card-table.*)

MRS. H. Blame your parents—not me!

MRS. P. But I never use it, *never!*

MRS. H. (*uninterested.*) Don't you? (*rings bell and moves down* L. *to writing-table.*)

MRS. P. *Everybody* calls me by my second name—Camilla—except my husband, and, of course, he doesn't count.

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E.)

MRS. H. (*turns*). Bring some fresh tea, Clara.

CLARA. Yes, ma'am. (*takes teapot from tray, and exits* L.U.E.)

MRS. H. (*to* MRS. P.). I must try and remember, but I have the most appalling memory for names.

MRS. P. Really!

MRS. H. Jack, Mrs. Pertwee wants to talk to you about souls.

JACK. *À la Colbert,* or filleted? (MRS. H. *motions to* QUAYLE *to sit down. He alters the position of armchair* R. *of tea-table, so that he can sit rather above* MRS. H. *and facing the audience.*

MRS. P. (*sits* R. *end of sofa and laughs shrilly*). Oh, oh! Jester, jester! What a delightful sense of humour. My husband can *never* see a joke unless it's hurled at him. (HYACYNTH *sits* L. *of her on sofa.*)

Mrs. H. Perhaps he's Scotch. (*sits chair above tea-table.*)

MRS. P. I like delightfully subtle humour;

humour that it takes years to discover; humour that requires an incorporated society to explain its meaning.

(CLARA *brings in fresh tea and standing* L. *of table places it on tray. Exit* CLARA L.U.E.)

MRS. H. How splendid! Mr. Quayle, let me give you some tea.

QUAYLE. Thank you, thank you.

(MRS. H. *pours out tea. She and* QUAYLE *sit at tea-table and talk.* MRS. PERTWEE *and* JACK *are seated on sofa.*)

JACK. Well, Mrs. Pertwee, tell me about——

MRS. P. Kindred Souls?

JACK. What is it?

MRS. P. It's a new society for discovering latent humour in unlikely quarters.

JACK. Oh!

MRS. P. We are starting with the stage.

JACK. Indeed!

MRS. P. We have discovered one quite remarkable genius.

JACK. Already?

MRS. P. He has been writing farcical comedies for nineteen years.

JACK. He must be a millionaire.

MRS. P. (*very confidentially*). Oh, no! His wit is too fine, too sub-acute for the vulgar herd. (*Their heads are very close together.*)

MRS. H. (*severely to* JACK). Tea, Jack?

JACK. Thanks. (*rises and* MRS. H. *hands him cup.*) Who does he write for then?

MRS. P. The select few.

JACK (*doubtfully*). I see. (*sits on sofa again.*)

MRS. P. Would you believe it, in all these years only three of his plays have been produced and then instead of laughing, the audience cried!

JACK. Great Scott!

MRS. P. But the Kindred Souls are going to change all that. Our audiences will be composed of men and women of intelligence—they will begin to laugh before the curtain goes up. By degrees we shall educate the public, and before many years have passed people will roar at the mere mention of the author's name.

JACK. He ought to be very much obliged to you.

MRS. P. We satisfy our artistic sense. We seek no thanks.

JACK (*rises and places cup on card-table* C.). Quayle, this is something in your line.

QUAYLE. Umph! Umph! What is that?

JACK. A society for explaining people's jokes.

QUAYLE (*dully*). Oh!

JACK. You might mention the matter to one or two members of the Judicial Bench. (*returns and stands talking to* MRS. PERTWEE.

QUAYLE (*not understanding*). Oh!

MRS. H. Cigarette, Mr. Quayle?

QUAYLE. No, thank you.

MRS. P. (*rising*). Well, I must be going.

MRS. H. Oh! don't go yet—Louisa. (*rings bell at fireplace.*)

(MRS. P. *glares.*)

Cassandra, I mean. (*moves up to above card-table.*)

(QUAYLE *replaces armchair in its original position by tea-table and crosses and stands with back to fireplace.*)

MRS. P. (*with a shrill laugh crosses* HYACYNTH, *and moves up to join* MRS. HYACYNTH). Oh! oh! you're *so* funny. Good-bye, dear. (*shakes hands with* MRS. H.) I'm dining at Hampstead.

JACK (*who has got below sofa* R.). Ghastly place to get to!

MRS. P. (*coming down to him and shaking hands*). Everybody thinks so, except the inhabitants. Good-bye, Mr. Hyacynth. (*crosses below card-table to*

QUAYLE *who is at fireplace, shakes hands, and then moves up to entrance* L.U.E.) Good-bye, Mr. Quayle. It's an awful drive, and unfortunately I've no young man to escort *me!* (*laughing shrilly.*) Oh! oh! Good-bye.

(*Exit* L.U.E.)

MRS. H. A society of Kindred Cats would suit her better. (*crosses down, rings bell.*)

JACK (*takes cup from card-table and places it on tea-tray.*) She rather amused me this afternoon. (*crosses back to below card-table.* QUAYLE *moves round above card-table and sits* R. *end of sofa.*)

MRS. H. (*with mock seriousness*). So it appeared! You were flirting on the sofa in a perfectly scandalous way. Wasn't he, Mr. Quayle? (*crosses to* HYACYNTH C.)

QUAYLE. He seemed interested. (*sits.*)

MRS. H. Very!

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E.)

You can take the tea-things, Clara.

CLARA. Yes, ma'am.

(CLARA *removes tea-table and cake-stand.*)

MRS. H. Will you be shocked if I smoke a cigarette, Mr. Quayle? (MRS. H. *casually twists armchair round, and pulls it backwards from tea-table to* L. *of card-table.*)

QUAYLE (*grunts*). I confess that I don't like to see ladies smoking. I dare say it's old-fashioned prejudice.

MRS. H. I see you want educating, Mr. Quayle. (*crosses to writing-table down* L.) Jack has been properly brought up. (*To* JACK.) Haven't you, my bird? (*sits at writing-table.*)

JACK (*laughs, and sits armchair, which is now* L. *of card-table*). Any new species in the aviary to-day?

MRS. H. No, only Billy Skews. (*lights cigarette.*)

QUAYLE (*on sofa*). Did I understand you to say—aviary?

JACK. Yes, this is where she keeps her birds. Would you like to join the collection?

QUAYLE (*with a grunting laugh*). I'm afraid I'm too old!

MRS. H. Oh! it's never too late to mend. Let me see, how shall I classify you? You will, of course, be a very learned bird—a very wise bird—you will *be*—oh! (*breaks off and covers her face with her hands.*) I nearly said a dre-a-dful thing.

QUAYLE. Oh! (*grunts.*) How were you going to designate me?

MRS. H. (*looking out from between her hands*). As an owl!

(JACK *roars with laughter.* QUAYLE, *rather annoyed, gives his grunting laugh.*)

QUAYLE. Very good—um—um—very good.

MRS. H. It was dre-a-dful, wasn't it?

QUAYLE. I suppose they are all *male* birds in your aviary, Mrs. Hyacynth?

MRS. H. Yes, I don't admit hens—they peck!

QUAYLE. Indeed!

MRS. H. (*looking at him*). And if there's any pecking to do, I can manage it myself.

QUAYLE. So I should imagine.

JACK. You're going out with Billy Skews, aren't you?

MRS. H. Yes; he's calling for me at a quarter to seven. I've promised to be ready in time, but I don't think it's very probable.

JACK. Am I dining at home, or at the club?

MRS. H. Here, of course.

JACK (*doubtfully*). Oh!—what is there for dinner?

MRS. H. Sole, cutlets, a bird and a savoury.

JACK. Quayle, does that appeal to you?

QUAYLE. Very much.

JACK. Then you'd better stop and dine with me.

QUAYLE. Thank you, I shall be delighted.

MRS. H. (*rises and moves to back of* JACK'S *chair*). That's all right. You can reminisce to your heart's content. I must say, Jack, I think it was very unkind of you not to see Mrs. Pertwee to Hampstead.

JACK. Why on earth should I ?

MRS. H. (*at back of chair, playing with his hair*). You know she adores you. .

JACK. Rats !

MRS. H. It's all very well to assume this air of indifference, but I believe that secretly you worship her !

JACK. Don't talk rot, Dicky. (*rises and moves* R.C.) Run along and dress.

MRS. H. What shall I wear, my bird ?

JACK (*carelessly*). Oh ! anything you like.

MRS. H. (*moves a little to him. Severely*). Jack, please be serious. Now, what shall I wear ?

JACK. Oh ! I don't know, dear. One of your Ascot frocks.

MRS. H. The pink ?

JACK. Yes—the pink.

MRS. H. All right. (*moves to writing-table and places cigarette on ash tray.*) That's the one I meant to wear.

JACK. Good. (*moves a little* L.)

MRS. H. (*crosses* C.) If you hear a noise like a fusillade of artillery don't be alarmed. It's Billy's new motor. Now I must fly like a swift hare.

(*Exit quickly* R.I.E. *into bedroom.*)

JACK (*touching bell at fireplace*). Have a whisky and soda, Quayle ?

QUAYLE. Thank you, I will.

JACK. Cigarette ? (*moves* C. *and hands box.*) We smoke all over the flat.

QUAYLE (*rises*). So I observed. (*takes cigarette.*)

JACK (*laughs, replaces box on writing-table*). Dicky smokes like a chimney, doesn't she ?

QUAYLE. Do you think it's good for her? (
R. *of card-table* C.)

JACK (*at writing-table*). Oh! *she's* all right.

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E.)

JACK. Bring whisky and soda, Clara.

CLARA. Yes, sir.

(*Exits into dining-room* R.U.E.)

JACK. Dicky's a sportsman. (*lights cigarette.*)

QUAYLE (*doubtfully*). Humph! (*lights cigarett*

JACK. You don't approve of her, eh?

QUAYLE. My dear Hyacynth, I wouldn't presu
to say *that!*

JACK. You old duffer. You don't move with
times.

QUAYLE. Possibly not.

(*Re-enter* CLARA *from dining-room* R.U.E. *with whi*
a syphon and two glasses on a tray, which she pl
on card-table C.)

JACK. Now then, have a drink. It will enla
your views. Help yourself.

QUAYLE. Thank you. (*mixes himself a drin*

(CLARA *exits* L.U.E.)

JACK (*above table*). You were broader-minded
the old days, Quayle. Do you remember when
shared rooms in Jermyn Street?

QUAYLE. Oh, yes!

JACK. You were a bit of a terror then, Quayl

QUAYLE. I have no recollection of it.

JACK (*mixing a whisky and soda*). You old h
bug! How about Gertie Bolingbroke? (*lau*
at the recollection.)

QUAYLE (*alarmed*). Hush! Really, rea
Hyacynth!

QUAYLE. I was referring to the modern woman.

JACK (*laughs*). I see. You want to have all the fun to yourself.

QUAYLE. I think it a bad thing for any country when its womenfolk become irresponsible.

JACK. But, my dear fellow, they always have been.

QUAYLE. No; at one time home ties meant something to them—they mean nothing now.

JACK. Oh, rot! I've been married ten years and I wouldn't change places with any man on earth.

QUAYLE. You're happy then?

JACK. Perfectly.

QUAYLE (*grunts*). Humph!

JACK. Dicky and I are the best of pals.

QUAYLE (*grunts*). Humph!

JACK. Now, you're grunting. That means you've something unpleasant to say.

QUAYLE (*grunts*). Humph!

JACK. Out with it.

QUAYLE (*grunts*). Humph!

JACK. Will you stop grunting and say what you mean?

QUAYLE. Well, there *is* something.

JACK. I thought so.

QUAYLE. We've been friends a good many years.

JACK. And that gives you the right to say unpleasant things. Get along.

QUAYLE. Well, I'm very sorry to say it, Hyacynth, but your wife's getting talked about.

JACK (*springing up*). What!

QUAYLE. Above all things, let us keep calm.

JACK. What the devil do you mean?

QUAYLE. People are saying unpleasant things.

JACK. What people?

QUAYLE. Everybody.

JACK (*crosses down* L.). Infernal impudence. I'll horsewhip the blackguards——

QUAYLE. My dear——

JACK (*turns*). I tell you I'll take the skin off 'em——

QUAYLE. Listen——

JACK. Why are they talking, and where are they talking and what are they talking about? (*crosses up* L.)

QUAYLE. My dear Hyacynth, pray don't get excited.

JACK (*above table*). Do you imagine I'm going to sit down calmly and hear my wife insulted?

QUAYLE. No, no; you entirely mistake me.

JACK. Well?

QUAYLE. People are saying she goes about too much with young men. She and young Skews are always together.

JACK (*still above table* C.). And why the devil shouldn't they be? Her friends are my friends.

QUAYLE. Of course there's nothing in it.

JACK. Look here, drop it, Quayle! Do you hear? —drop it.

QUAYLE. Of course it's no business of mine——

JACK (*crosses down* L. *and places cigarette on the ash-tray on writing-table*). No, nor of anybody else's! Infernal meddling busybodies!

QUAYLE (*rises and moves down* R.). Well, if I were in your place I *think* I should give her a hint.

JACK (*to him*, C.). Of all the thundering cheek!

QUAYLE. You see the worst of it is, it makes *you* look a little ridiculous.

JACK (C.). Eh?

QUAYLE. People shake their heads and say, "Poor old Hyacynth!" (*sits sofa*).

JACK (*annoyed*). The devil they do!

QUAYLE. And they add—"I can't think how he can allow it."

JACK (*crosses down* L.). Tschah!

QUAYLE. And conclude by remarking, "How will it end?"

JACK (*goes up* L.). Scandalmongering idiots!

QUAYLE. Exactly. Still there it is.

JACK (*gets round above table* C., *to* R.). The thing's absolute tosh. Dicky 's as straight as a die!

QUAYLE. Of course, of course, we're not discussing that.

JACK (*stands by* QUAYLE, *who is still seated on sofa*). What do you mean then?

QUAYLE. Simply, I should advise her to be a little more discreet.

JACK. But, my good man, she'd laugh in my face.

QUAYLE. Then you must adopt other means.

JACK (*moves to writing-table,* L.). I'm hanged if I will. Let them talk their heads off.

QUAYLE. Just as you like, but it seems a pity.

JACK. What is? (*turns.*)

QUAYLE. That you should become a laughing stock.

JACK. Laughing stock! (*crosses* C.)

QUAYLE. That's what you're fast becoming.

JACK (C.) Damned annoying.

QUAYLE. And the talk won't grow less!

JACK. But I tell you if I spoke to her she'd laugh till she cried.

QUAYLE. Then you must supply a counter-irritant.

JACK. How?

QUAYLE. You must excite her jealousy.

JACK. Why?

QUAYLE. She thinks she holds you too securely. The modern woman regards herself as a free lance. She likes to have it all her own way. She wants her admirers and she wants her husband. Of course there's no harm in your wife, and if she thinks you're drifting away from her she'll very quickly drop her young men and keep a jealous eye on *you.*

JACK. Well? How am I to do it?

QUAYLE (*rises and moves* C. *to* HYACYNTH). The

thing is quite simple. Mrs. Pertwee adores you obviously.

JACK (*impatiently moves to writing-table*). I believe there's some nonsense of the kind.

QUAYLE (*sits L. of writing-table*). Very well. Write a passionate letter to Mrs. Pertwee. Ask her to meet you here to-night during your wife's absence. Put in heaps of love and endearing epithets and address it, but be careful to leave the envelope unfastened. Then leave it on your escritoire as though you had forgotten it. Your wife will come in—discover it—and——

JACK. She won't read it. (*moves to* QUAYLE.)

QUAYLE. She will hesitate, in the end curiosity will gain the day. She will be furious. There will be a violent scene. There will be mutual recriminations. At last you will promise to give up Mrs. Pertwee, if she dismisses her young men. Thus gossip will be silenced, and the rest of your life will be placidly domesticated.

JACK. Well, I think it's rot.

QUAYLE (*with a shrug*). That's a matter of opinion.

JACK. Is it likely I should fall in love with Mrs. Pertwee?

QUAYLE. My dear sir, men will fall in love with *anything*. If it were not so, the office of registrar would become a sinecure.

JACK. Well, have it your own way.

QUAYLE. Capital. Now sit down and write the letter.

JACK (*moves to writing-table, then turns*). No, I'm hanged——

QUAYLE. Sit down.

JACK. I shan't. (*moves up* L.)

QUAYLE. Eh?

JACK (*coming down to* QUAYLE). I tell you I'm not going to. Why should I risk a row with my wife? It's a very serious matter.

QUAYLE. It is.

JACK. Dicky and I have never had a word.

QUAYLE. Well, of course, if you don't mind being a figure of fun.

JACK. Figure of fun?

QUAYLE. A byword on the Stock Exchange.

JACK. What?

QUAYLE. An object of derision——

JACK. Quayle!

QUAYLE. A club joke!

JACK. Shut up—d'ye hear?

QUAYLE. A——

JACK. Shut up. I won't be made ridiculous.

QUAYLE. Precisely. It is to save you from ridicule that I suggest the letter.

JACK. I'm an easy-going chap, but I won't be made ridiculous. (*moves down to writing-table.*)

QUAYLE. Sit down.

JACK. Well, I think it's absolute tosh! (*picks up pen and sheet of paper.*)

QUAYLE. Perhaps you'll find the old-fashioned solicitor understands women better than you do.

JACK. Oh, does he? (*sits at writing-table.*)

QUAYLE. I think so.

JACK. Well, get on.

QUAYLE. Are you ready?

JACK (*impatiently*). Yes, yes.

(QUAYLE *adjusts his eyeglasses, and with extreme pomposity dictates the letter.*)

QUAYLE (*coughs*). "My own darling——"

JACK (*turning in amazement*). What?

QUAYLE (*repeating*). "My own darling——"

JACK. Oh! I say, draw it mild!

QUAYLE. Please write as I dictate. "My own darling——"

JACK (*writing*). "My own darling——" (*laughs*). What rot!

QUAYLE (*dictating*). "I have secretly loved you for many months——"

JACK (*turns*). Well, I'm——

QUAYLE (*motions him to proceed*). "I have secretly loved you for many months." Got that?

JACK (*laughs*). Yes, I've got it badly.

QUAYLE (*continuing*). "I adore you with the tempestuous passion of my ardent nature. You are my sun——"

JACK (*turning*). Hang it, she can't be that!

QUAYLE (*spelling*). S-u-n.

JACK. Oh! (*resumes writing.*) S-u-n, sun—yes?

QUAYLE. "You fill my world with the bright effulgence of your rays. In your presence, I grow—I grow——" (*hesitates*).

JACK (*suggesting*). Turnips?

QUAYLE (*silencing him with a gesture*). "Grow dizzy at the sight of your matchless beauty!"

JACK. Oh! come, I say.

QUAYLE. Write it down.

JACK (*laughs and writes*). "—matchless beauty."

QUAYLE. "I long to take you in my arms and rain kisses on your lips."

(JACK *laughs.*)

There's nothing to laugh at.

JACK. Isn't there? (*laughing.*)

QUAYLE. "Come to me to-night, darling. My wife will be out. By half-past nine the coast will be clear. Come and let me press you to my heart in a long embrace. Your ever devoted and adoring, Jack Hyacynth." There! (*rises and crosses* R.)

JACK. Where did you learn your epistolary style, Quayle?

QUAYLE. From *An Erotic Lady's Love Letters.*

JACK (*rises and moves* C.) My aunt! (*looks at letter.*)

QUAYLE. Read it out.

JACK. "My own darling, I have secretly loved you for many months. I adore you with the tem-

pestuous passion of my ardent nature. You are ı sun "—s-u-n—" you fill my world with the brig effulgence of your rays. In your presence, I gr dizzy at the sight of your matchless beauty. long to take you in my arms and rain kisses on yc lips. Come to me to-night, darling. My wife will out. By half-past nine the coast will be cle Come and let me press you to my heart in a lc embrace. Your ever devoted and adoring Ja Hyacynth."

QUAYLE. Excellent!

JACK. It's the greatest blither I ever read.

QUAYLE. You are evidently unacquainted with r original.

JACK. Well, what's to be done now?

QUAYLE. Place it in an envelope and address

JACK (*moves to writing-table and encloses letter envelope*). Have you ever played this little jc before?

QUAYLE. In point of fact—no!

JACK. I thought not. (*directs envelope.*)

QUAYLE. But I have no doubt as to a success issue.

JACK. I think you're over sanguine.

QUAYLE. We shall see.

JACK (*moves* C.). Where shall I put it? (*tu and moves to fireplace.*) On the mantelpiece? Sh bound to see it there.

QUAYLE. Too obvious. No, no, leave it on 1 writing-table.

JACK (*down a few steps*). She'll never find it.

QUAYLE. I intend to make her find it. (*mo behind* JACK *to fireplace.*)

JACK. Well, make haste. She'll be here in minute.

QUAYLE. (*picks up latch-key attached to a small ch from mantelpiece*). This is her latch-key, I presum

JACK. Yes.

QUAYLE. She's sure to want her latch-key. The

fore, place it near the letter. She'll discover both at the same time.

JACK. I say, Quayle, you'll hurt yourself if you go on like this. (*takes key and puts it on letter on writing-table.*)

QUAYLE. Before all things I am logical. No, no, my dear fellow. Not *on* the letter—that would give the thing away at once. Near it, near it

JACK (*re-arranges key*). I see. There.

QUAYLE. Capital.

JACK (*moves up* L.). I think we'll have a bottle of champagne for dinner, Quayle. Just touch the bell, will you? It will act as a restorative if Dicky and I have a row.

QUAYLE (*touching bell push*). And I'll drink to many years of happy married life.

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E.)

JACK. Clara, we'll have a bottle of the '93 Bollinger for dinner. There *is* some port out, isn't there?

CLARA. Yes, sir.

JACK. You know Mr. Quayle is staying to dinner?

CLARA. Yes, sir. I've put some hot water in the spare room, sir.

JACK. Good.

(MRS. HYACYNTH'S *voice is heard calling from her bedroom, "Clara! Clara!"*)

Your mistress is calling you, Clara.

CLARA. Yes, sir. (*crosses at back of table* C. *and exits into bedroom* R.I.E.)

JACK. Come along, old man. (QUAYLE *joins him* C.) The train is laid, the fuse is lighted——

QUAYLE. And the explosion (*pointing towards letter*) is imminent!

(*Exeunt arm-in-arm,* R.U.E.)

(CLARA *enters quickly from bedroom and crosses to mantelpiece.*)

CLARA. No, m'm, it isn't here.

(*Enter* MRS. HYACYNTH *quickly from bedroom. She wears a very lovely evening frock and wonderful wrap.*)

MRS. H. (R.). Where *did* I put my latch-key? Oh, Clara! what's to be done?

(*Horn toots loudly, and the sound of a motor is heard.*)

I'm horribly late and (*runs to window*) I can hear the motor positively snorting with rage. It's too tragic! (*returns from window.*) I'm certain I had it this morning.

CLARA. I'll try the dressing-table again.

(*Exit* CLARA *into bedroom* R.I.E.)

MRS. H. Yes, fly like a swift hare, Clara. (*searches on mantelpiece—calls*) Found it, Clara?

CLARA (*from without*). No, m'm.

MRS. H. How annoying it is. I must go without it—that's all. (*at writing table.*) Oh, joy! joy! (*calls.*) Clara, I've found it.

(*Re-enter* CLARA *from bedroom.*)

CLARA. That's all right, m'm. (*crosses to above table,* C.)

MRS. H. Hullo! (*picks up letter.*)

(*Electric bell rings.*)

That's Mr. Skews, Clara. Run and tell him I'm coming in a second.

CLARA. Yes, m'm. (*Exit* L.U.E.)

MRS. H. How odd! (*Puts down letter, moves to table* C., *pauses, reflects, comes back to writing-table, re-examines letter.*) Curious! (*Is going to open it, thinks better of it, puts it down, moves* C., *goes up* R., *of table to* L.U.E., *stands at door for a second thinking, then swiftly returns to writing-table and picks up*

letter. Yes! *She* [illegible] *gloves* [illegible] *reads letter. She* [illegible] Well! [illegible] *crescendo of shocked surprise.* [illegible] *first she swoons, then she* [illegible] *moves* [illegible] *and fastens it down.*

[illegible]

CLARA. Mr. [illegible]

MRS. H. [illegible] note up to Mrs. [illegible] *it* [illegible]

(CLARA *takes letter and* [illegible]

(MRS. HYACYNTH [illegible] *gloves and purse and* [illegible] *and* [illegible] L.U.E., *as the*

CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II.

SCENE.—*The same.*

TIME.—*Evening. The electric lights are switched on, and the curtains are drawn. Card-table* C. *to be moved down a little, and writing-table and chair* L. *to be brought out a short space from the wall.*

(QUAYLE *is discovered standing on the hearth-rug, smoking a cigar. He wears the same clothes as in the previous Act.* JACK *wears a dinner coat and black tie and is seated in a position of despair* R. *of table* C.)

QUAYLE. Above all things, let's be logical.

JACK. Logic be hanged. (*rises and moves down* R.)

QUAYLE. Now what are the facts of the case?

JACK (*turns*). First, you've placed me in a most compromising position—*that's* pretty clear. (*goes up* R.)

QUAYLE. I admit that my plan has slightly miscarried.

JACK (*turns*). Miscarried! (*moves down* R.) I knew your silly joke would lead to trouble. (*paces restlessly up again* R.)

QUAYLE. You take too gloomy a view of the situation. I always understood that stockbrokers were full of high spirits.

JACK (*above sofa*). Not on settling day! With a prospect of getting hammered.

QUAYLE. Pooh! pooh! Now we have dined excellently——

JACK. *You* have. (*moves down* R.)

QUAYLE. Your '93 Bollinger was excellent—let us view the matter in a judicial spirit.

JACK (*savagely*). Tschah! (*turns and moves to chair* R. *of table* C.)

QUAYLE. You have written a highly amatory epistle——

JACK (*with a groan*). Oh! (*sinks iuto chair* R. *of table.*)

QUAYLE.—to a somewhat romantic and hysterical person who occupies the flat above.

(JACK *groans.*)

Your wife has discovered the letter. Some wives might have read it.

JACK (*quickly*). Dicky wouldn't!

QUAYLE. At any rate, Dicky *didn't!* Had she done so, the scene I anticipated would have occurred and instead of play-going with young Skews she would have remained at home and made it up.

JACK. What actually happens? Dicky finds the letter, sends it up unread to Mrs. Pertwee, and at half-past nine I shall undergo the most ghastly experience of my lifetime.—(*rises and moves down* R.)

QUAYLE. Above all things, let us keep cool.

JACK (*turns wildly and goes up* R.) Cool! Oh!

QUAYLE. Let us, so to speak, clear the decks for action.

JACK (*turns*). For action! That's what I'm afraid of.

QUAYLE. What have we done?

JACK (*stands above table* C.). Done! You've done nothing, except stand on the hearth-rug and wag your old bald head like a learned pundit. (*moves down* R.)

QUAYLE (*shocked*). Please, please!

JACK (*down* R.) I'm sorry! (*savagely*). Do you hear—I'm sorry!

QUAYLE (*affably*). I accept your apology—once again what have we done?

JACK. First of all I've sent out the servants.

QUAYLE. Why?

JACK. I don't want all the world to know that Mrs. Pertwee visited me during my wife's absence!

QUAYLE (*pompously*). Good! I pass that.

JACK. Then as you know, I sent up a note to try and stop the woman, but she'd already left for Hampstead. Before going she wrote this. (*takes letter from side-pocket.*)

QUAYLE (*on hearthrug.*) Ah! Read it again.

JACK (*sits sofa*). "My dearest one"—Oh! my hat!—"Loved of my heart!" Oh!—"my dream has come true. I long to nestle in your arms, like a little fluttering bird."—My arms aren't strong enough—"The hours seem endless till our meeting. I shall feign illness and return from my dinner party in time to be with you at nine-thirty,

"Your loving,
THRUSH."

QUAYLE (*moves to chair* L. *of table*). Why Thrush?

JACK. Goodness knows! I'd like to wring her neck.

QUAYLE. The interview may be unpleasant, still, since you can't prevent it——

JACK (*rises and goes up* R.). I will though. I'll go out. I'll stay out all night. I'll stay out for years!

QUAYLE. You forget.

JACK (*turns*). What?

QUAYLE. You've sent out the servants. They will return, I imagine, at ten, and will be unable to gain admittance.

JACK (*above sofa*). That's no go. (*angrily*) Well, for goodness' sake suggest something—you keep pooh-poohing everything I propose.

QUAYLE. The matter is really quite simple.

JACK (*impatiently*). Tschah!

QUAYLE. Follow my directions and you need fear nothing.

JACK. Well?

QUAYLE. In a few minutes Mrs. Pertwee will arrive.

JACK (*sinks into chair* R. *of table. Groans*). Oh!

QUAYLE. Your explanation will be perfectly logical.

JACK (*sarcastically*). *Will* it?

QUAYLE. You will say that you've been reading *An Erotic Lady's Love Letters*—as a mild joke you had yourself concocted a similar epistle, for the amusement of a friend. By an unhappy chance this was placed in an envelope addressed to Mrs. Pertwee, instead of a card inviting her to supper on Sunday next.

JACK (*doubtfully*). That *sounds* all right.

QUAYLE. It is perfect.

JACK (*rises and moves down* R.). You must back me up.

QUAYLE. I shall be near at hand.

JACK (*turns*). Can't you remain in the room?

QUAYLE. Of course not.

JACK. Then you must wait in the kitchen.

QUAYLE. Kitchen! (*Moves down* L.)

JACK. In case of danger, I shall touch the bell—it rings in the kitchen, and the moment you hear it you must rush to my assistance.

QUAYLE (*doubtfully*). Will there be black beetles?

JACK (*lightly*). I dare say.

QUAYLE. Black beetles fill me with positive terror.

JACK (*moves* R.C.). Now, look here, Quayle, you've got to play the game.

QUAYLE. But really—— (*A little* L.)

JACK. I'm in a tight corner, and you've got to see me through.

QUAYLE (*turns*). But black beetles!

JACK (L.C.) Now we're getting square. You've got to face black beetles—I've got to face Mrs. Pert-

wee; don't grumble, you've got the best of the bargain.

QUAYLE. Please make the interview as short as possible.

JACK. You may trust me for that. (*glances at clock on mantelpiece*). It's just on half-past nine. You had better take up your position.

QUAYLE (*fretfully*). Where *is* the kitchen?

JACK. I'll show you. (*takes him to door* L.U.E. *and points off.*) It's the third door on the right. D'you see—there!

QUAYLE (*plaintively*). Have you any beetle powder?

JACK. Yes, in the kitchen. Do be quick.

QUAYLE. I'd sooner face a dozen lions.

JACK. Don't fuss—get along. Come, come, be a man.

(*Pushes* QUAYLE *out of door* L.U.E.)

(JACK *crosses to window and looks out and listens. He then hastens to sideboard* R. *and pours out a whisky and soda. Just as he is raising the glass to his lips a piano organ plays "Put me among the Girls." A ghastly smile overspreads his face and with a gesture and nod at the window, he drinks. The electric bell then rings and he coughs and splutters. Hastily putting down his glass he hurries out* L.U.E.)

(*The organ continues to play. The hall door opens.* MRS. PERTWEE'S *voice is heard in the distance—then* JACK'S.)

(*Enter* MRS. PERTWEE L.U.E. *in evening dress, followed by* JACK. *She hurries to* R.C., *holding her hands to her ears.*)

MRS. P. A piano organ! Horrible! Please stop them!

JACK. I will. (*moves to window* C. *and gesticulates.*)

MRS. P. (*turns*). What horrid thing are they playing?

JACK (*grimly*). "Put me among the Girls."

MRS. P. (*with a simper moves down to sofa*). Oh!

(*The organ stops.*)

I've had a terrible drive from Hampstead. The cabman sang Bacchanalian songs all the way. (*sits* R. *end of sofa.*)

JACK (*moves down very nervously* L. *to below table* C.) How beastly.

MRS. P. But it didn't matter. I was buoyed up by the thought that in a few brief minutes my destiny would be fulfilled. My heart was filled with a joy too deep for expression—the atmosphere seemed charged with the perfume of a thousand flowers—the centuries fell back and it seemed that I was wandering in Juliet's garden. It was on such a Southern night as *this*, that——

JACK (*who has been getting more and more nervous*). Yes, I remember the incident. (*moves quickly towards the bell push below fireplace.*)

MRS. P. (*rises and crosses* C.). Do you want anything?

JACK (*turns, confused*). No, no. I sometimes ring the bell, you know—just as other people play the pianola.

MRS. P. (L. *of table*). Ah, yes. (*A pause, then meaningly.*) Isn't it *wonderful*?

JACK (*hastily*). It is! I don't know a note of music, yet I can play Chopin like an angel.

MRS. P. (*intensely*). *Can* you—*can* you? I love music, yet I did not refer to Chopin then, I meant——

JACK (*hastily*). Sousa or Sullivan—it's all one.

MRS. P. You don't understand——

JACK (*interrupting*). Oh! yes, I do. (*Hastily.*) I'm immensely interested in music too. In fact, we always go to the opera—if we can't get in elsewhere—Wagner now! I'm great on Wagner—I prefer

Wagner to anybody. No chance of going to sleep if you're near the orchestra.

MRS. P. I might have known that the master would appeal to you. The love duet from *Tristan und Isolde* cries out to me more eloquently than aught else in music. It is the heart song of two glorious natures. It sings of gossamer shapes that float in dreams. It croons and whispers and cries out in pain. I heard it first at Bayreuth. (*Climax and pause.*) I fainted. (*sinks back into armchair* L. *of table.*)

JACK. Bless my soul! (*sits at writing-table.*)

MRS. P. For three weeks I was wheeled about in a bath chair.

JACK. Extraordinary!

MRS. P. Ah, no! I'm like that.

JACK. Well—I think you ought to be more careful. Perhaps the pantomime would be safer.

MRS. P. We cannot change our natures. I have sought the one who holds red roses in his hand (*Jack quickly puts his hands behind his back*)—the one whose soul would bend to mine in joyous unison—the one whose voice would set my thoughts to music—all my life I have been misunderstood—always till now.

JACK (*quickly*). Talking of Bayreuth—I suppose the theatre there's very fine?

MRS. P. I did not notice—I lived in an atmosphere of love.

JACK. I see—you were there with Mr. Pertwee.

MRS. P. My husband! No! *He* sat in the sunshine and read the four hundredth edition of *Three Men in a Boat.*

JACK. Jolly funny.

MRS. P. My husband is a Philistine in spectacles. He wears grey flannel shirts and horrible clumpetty boots—he speaks of me as "the wife"—ugh!—and he sings a detestable song called "Widdicombe Fair!" There are countless verses and each end with the line, "Uncle Tom Cobley and all." I

is *hideous*. Sometimes at the opera when Melba's singing I fancy I hear that loathsome refrain, "Uncle Tom Cobley and all."

JACK. Dear, dear.

MRS. P. He'll lop off the head of an egg—with the dexterity of a Monsieur de Paris—he crumbs his bread, and tucks his napkin into his waistcoat—Oh! the horror of being mated to such as he—*my* artistic temperament bound to his shoddy, middle-class suburban nature—it is cruel! cruel! But it doesn't matter now. (*passionately.*) Oh! give me your roses and I will wear them. (*rises.*)

JACK (*springing up and moving to bell, alarmed*). My goodness!

MRS. P. Do not turn from me. I have long loved you in secret. I never meant to speak, but (*taking letter from her bosom*) after your sweet avowal, I need pause no longer. Come to me, dear one!

JACK (*terribly uncomfortable, and placing a chair between himself and* MRS. PERTWEE). I—I appreciate your kind remarks very much indeed. In fact, I—feel greatly interested—in what you say. At the same time, I have something rather difficult to explain and——

MRS. P. Tell me—confide in me.

JACK. You see, in this world, everything depends on your point of view.

MRS. P. Very true.

JACK. One man's meat is poison——

MRS. P. To a vegetarian?

JACK. Exactly.

MRS. P. Well?

JACK. What might seem a frightfully funny joke to *me*, mightn't strike *you* in the same light.

(*Re-enter* QUAYLE, L.U.E. MRS. PERTWEE *has her back to the door and does not notice* QUAYLE'S *entrance.*)

MRS. P. (*crosses* R. *replacing letter*). The editor of a

comic paper must often suffer in that way. (J*replaces chair by writing-table and clasping his b moves up* L.)

QUAYLE (*in a hoarse whisper*). Where's the bee powder? (JACK *waves to him to go away.*)

MRS. P. (*turns and moves to* R. *of table and si* We have so much in common that I feel s I shall grasp your meaning. (*picks up a book glances coyly down at it.*)

QUAYLE. Where's the beetle powder?

JACK. In the cupboard you fool, get out.

(*Pushes* QUAYLE *out.*)

MRS. P. What was that?

JACK (L.). Nothing, nothing.

MRS. P. I thought I heard a voice.

JACK. Merely the people next door, one hears plainly in a flat.

(*China crash heard off.*)

MRS. P. (*starting and moving down* R.) Wha strange noise!

JACK (*mopping his brow below table* C.). That's man below. He's an amateur conjuror—he's pr tising with plates. Do sit down.

MRS. P. I thought some one was in the flat. I were found here, I should be hopelessly compromis

JACK. It's quite all right, I assure you. I bolted the door.

MRS. P. (*with a sigh of satisfaction*). Ah!

JACK. Eh? (*turns, then realizes what he said.*) Oh! (*scratches his head and moves up* L.)

(*Re-enter* QUAYLE L.U.E.)

QUAYLE (*in a hoarse whisper*). I can't find it.

JACK. Go to the devil.

(*Kicks* QUAYLE *out* L.U.E.)

MRS. P. (*on sofa*). My nerves are terrible to-nig

I seem to hear whispers and voices and the banging of doors.

JACK (*crosses* C. *and comes down* R. *of table*). Pure imagination. To resume. Where was I?

MRS. P. You were about to tell me something.

JACK (*below table* C., *pulling himself together*). You will remember I sent you a letter early this evening——

MRS. P. Can I ever forget?

JACK. I don't know. Well, did the phrasing seem at all familiar?

MRS. P. More! It was passionate!

JACK. Never read anything like it before?

MRS. P. Never!

JACK. That's odd! You're a woman of wide culture.

MRS. P. I belong to Mudie's.

JACK. Then you must have surely come across that brilliant work called—called (*clasps his head*) what the devil *is* it called? (*crosses* L.C.)

MRS. P. *Songs of a Soul in Pain?*

JACK. No, no, no!

MRS. P. *Crimson Lips and Rue?*

JACK. No, no—ah! I have it!—(*moves back* R.C.) an *Idiotic Lady's Love Letters.*

MRS. P. I haven't read it.

JACK. Well, now, my letter—dear me. (*mops brow and moves* L., *aside*). This is damn difficult.

MRS. P. (*softly*). Yes?

JACK (*turns*). You see, the letters in the book are supposed to be written by a female who is very badly in love.

MRS. P. How well I know!

JACK. Yes—the style is very inflated and romantic—and all that—and——

MRS. P. (*softly*). Well?

JACK (*in agony, crosses* L., *aside*). This is awful.

MRS. P. Go on.

JACK (*with set teeth*). What I wrote to you was

supposed to be a burlesque of one of the letters in th book.

MRS. P. (*startled, rises*). What!

JACK. Oh! I know the whole thing is simp appalling!

MRS. P. (*gasping*). I don't understand. (*moves little down* R.)

JACK (*crosses to her*). It was just a silly piece nonsense intended to amuse a man—who was o my friend—After this I'll cut him dead (*shakes at door* L.U.E.). By some mischance, I put the thi in the wrong envelope and instead of enclosing invitation to supper, I sent you that absurd effusic

MRS. P. (*covers her face*). Oh! (*sinks onto sofa*

JACK. Great Scott! Oh! (*shakes his fist a moves towards door* L.U.E.) I'd like to——

MRS. P. (*buries her head in the sofa cushions*). O

JACK (*coming back*). You don't see the joke ju now, but (*turns*) oh! (*shaking his fist at door.*) I could only *get* at him!

MRS. P. (*sobbing*). Oh!

JACK. You'll grasp the point presently.

MRS. P. (*sobbing*). My—my—my—idol's shatter

JACK. Come, come, cheer up.

MRS. P. I think I'm going to faint.

JACK. Oh! I say—the joke's not as bad as th

MRS. P. Ah! (*moans.*) Ah! ah! (*faints sofa.*)

JACK. This is pretty damnable! (*looks at Fr then runs to bell and rings—returns and shakes he* What do you want to faint here for? It's perfect disgraceful! It's downright inconsiderate! (*fir slaps her left hand and then moves round to* R. *of sof and slaps her right hand.*) Come to, can't you—com to!

(*Enter* QUAYLE L.U.E. *His white socks are turned u over his trousers and he carries a large tin of Inse Death which he sprinkles in all directions. H*

frock coat is tucked up under his arms and he evidently imagines himself to be pursued by legions of blackbeetles.)

QUAYLE (*as he enters.*) I can endure it no longer.

JACK (*moves to above table* C. *and points to sofa*). Look! Look at your handiwork.

QUAYLE. Mine?

JACK. Yours! You come here with a cock-and-bull story about Dicky—you persuade me to adopt your ridiculous scheme—you force me into an impossible situation—you occupy my kitchen—you smash my china—you waste my beetle powder—and there you stand with a smile upon your lips—while your victim lies swooning on the sofa.

QUAYLE. I'm not smiling—I have just spent a period of fearful suspense.

JACK. Absurd, absurd! (*crosses impatiently to* R.)

QUAYLE. I've aged ten years in ten minutes.

JACK (*crosses* C., *interrupting*). Well, don't keep on talking—put down the beetle powder and suggest something.

(QUAYLE *places tin on mantelpiece.*)

QUAYLE. We must bring her round.

JACK (*above table*). But how, how?

QUAYLE. Water!

JACK. Quick—get some.

QUAYLE (*firmly*). Re-enter the kitchen—never!

JACK. Coward! coward!

(*Runs off* L.U.E.)

QUAYLE (*crosses swiftly to sofa, examines* MRS. PERTWEE—*nods*). Shamming! (*crosses to sideboard and pours out a whisky and soda.*)

(*Re-enter* JACK *with a basin of water* L.U.E. *He catches* QUAYLE *in the act of drinking.*)

JACK. You heartless brute!

QUAYLE. Not at all.

JACK (*holding the basin under his left arm stands above table* C.). To coolly drink whisky and soda while a woman lies senseless on the sofa.

QUAYLE. Above all things, let us keep calm. Have a drink. (*pours out spirit.*)

JACK (*in the manner of a romantic hero*). Have you no heart? Is all natural feeling dead within you? Are the days of chivalry indeed forgotten? Has our island story reached such a chapter that a man will stand by idle when a defenceless lady lingers—perhaps 'twixt life and death.

(QUAYLE *squirts soda from syphon.*)

Will nothing sting you—will nothing rouse you—will nothing wound your pride—that's enough soda, thanks. (*puts down basin on card-table,* C.)

QUAYLE. There. (*hands glass.*) You must be thirsty.

(JACK *seizes glass and drains it at a gulp*—QUAYLE *makes a movement to take back the glass.*)

JACK (*firmly*). It's useless to tempt me. I won't touch another drop!

QUAYLE (*taking glass and looking into it*). Humph!

(*Puts it down on sideboard.*)

JACK. What now—what now?

QUAYLE. Don't be alarmed—I'll restore her to consciousness in two seconds.

JACK. How?

QUAYLE. Leave it to me. (*crosses above table to mantelpiece.*)

JACK. Understand! (*picks up basin and hastily puts it outside door,* R.U.E.) No more of your tom-fool experiments.

QUAYLE. My remedy will be safe and efficacious. (*picks up tin.*)

JACK. What is it? (*comes down* R. *of sofa.*)

QUAYLE (*moves below table to sofa and matches* MRS. PERTWEE'S *face*). I'm going to sprinkle her with beetle powder.

(MRS. P. *makes a movement.*

I thought so! (*places tin on side-table and moves up* L. *and turns down his trousers.*

MRS. P. (*starting up*). Where am I? (*with a stifled cry*). Ah! (*points to* QUAYLE). Who's that?

JACK (R. *of sofa.*) Don't be alarmed—it's only the doctor.

MRS. P. Doctor?

JACK. It's quite safe—he's discretion itself.

MRS. P. Why's he here?

JACK. You were so ill—I had to get advice.

MRS. P. Didn't I meet him this afternoon?

JACK. Why shouldn't you?

MRS. P. But one only meets doctors in bedrooms. Besides—I thought he was a lawyer.

JACK. He's a doctor of laws. Feel her pulse, Quayle.

QUAYLE. Certainly. (*hurries down* L. *of table, crosses to sofa and sits* L. *of* MRS. PERTWEE). Pray allow me (*feels pulse*). You're rather fast. (*bobs his head down to listen to the beating of her heart.*) How's the heart?

MRS. P. I don't wear it on my sleeve.

QUAYLE. Quite right. I think you'll do now. (*rises and moves* C.)

MRS. P. I'm *so* hungry. I ate no dinner.

JACK. My dear Mrs. Pertwee you must be starving. Have some cake and biscuits. (*gets cake and biscuits from sideboard.*) The servants are out, unfortunately—(*offers cake and biscuits.*)

MRS. P. Thank you, I'll take the cake. (*takes a gigantic slice.*)

(JACK *replaces dish on sideboard.*)

QUAYLE. I should recommend a little alcohol taken medicinally.

MRS. P. (*eagerly*). Oh! please.

JACK. Of course. Pour out some, Quayle.

QUAYLE. Certainly. (*hurries to sideboard.*)

JACK (*softly to* MRS. P.) I'm most awfully so about the whole thing—still, it's all explained now isn't it? And I hope you'll try and forgive my stu blunder.

MRS. P. (*devouring cake*). We women always suf for the man we love.

JACK. That's why you're such angels. (*impa ently to* QUAYLE.) Come on, Quayle. Bring th whisky and soda.

QUAYLE. Here it is. (*brings it to* MRS. P. *drinks it straight off, they watch her*). Not too stro I hope?

MRS. P. No, thank you. I thought doct disapproved of alcohol.

QUAYLE (*below table* C.) Not the wealthy ones.

MRS. P. I see.

JACK (*turns to sideboard*). Have some more ca Mrs. Pertwee?

MRS. P. I haven't finished this yet.

(MRS. PERTWEE *is raising a piece of cake to her l when the bell rings loudly—a dead pause—they l at each other.*)

MRS. P. I thought I heard——

JACK. So did I!

QUAYLE. And I.

JACK (*crosses to mantelpiece and looks at cloc* Quarter to ten! Absurd! (*takes armchair from of table and places it two feet below table, so turned that can sit facing* MRS. PERTWEE.)

QUAYLE. Of course.

MRS. P. Of course!

JACK (*seated*). Let's see—what were we talki about——

(*Bell rings again.*)

Good heavens! (*starts up.*)

MRS. P. I'm lost. *(sinks.)*

QUAYLE *(taking glass.)* Allow me. *(goes glass on sideboard.)*

MRS. P. *(sobbing.)* I'm ruined.

JACK. We'll save you somehow. *(moves up L.)*

QUAYLE. *(goes up L. to window.)* The curtains!

JACK. Rats! Curtains are played out.

QUAYLE *(pointing to sofa.)* Under the sofa then.

JACK *(up C.)* No room, you idiot.

QUAYLE. Could we lower her by cords from the window?

MRS. P. *(R.)* No, no, not that.

QUAYLE *(crossing to fireplace.)* How about the chimney?

MRS. P. My frock would be ruined.

JACK *(angrily to* QUAYLE*.)* Your suggestions are perfectly rotten.

(Bell rings again.)

MRS. P. *(moves up R.)* What am I to do?

JACK *(points to R.1.E.)* Quick—into my wife's bedroom. *(she rushes to R.1.E.* QUAYLE *hurries to window C.)*

MRS. P. *(at door).* But if this should be your wife?

JACK. Into the kitchen then. *(she crosses in front of* JACK *and* QUAYLE *to L.U.E.)*

MRS. P. *(at door).* If this should be the servants?

JACK. Good Lord!

MRS. P. I—I'm going to faint.

QUAYLE *(snatches beetle tin from card-table).* No you don't!

JACK. An idea has struck me.

QUAYLE. Where?

JACK *(touching forehead).* Here.

QUAYLE *and* MRS. P. Well—well?

JACK. Ass that I was not to think of it before. *(rushes to oak chest and throws open lid.)* In here, quick!

MRS. P. No, no, I shall be suffocated.

JACK. Nonsense—I won't close the lid.
MRS. P. (*tearfully*). I can't!

(*Bell rings.* QUAYLE *points the beetle tin at her and forces her to cross in front of him to chest.*)

JACK *and* QUAYLE. You must!
JACK. Make haste!
MRS. P. My hair!
JACK. Bother your hair.
MRS. P. I—(*gets in*). I'm so frightened.
JACK. It's all right!

(*Bell rings.*)

Open the door, Quayle—it's bolted. (QUAYLE *hastily deposits tin on mantelpiece and exits* L.U.E.)
You'll be quite happy in there. Don't let the lid fall to or you'll get locked in and won't be able to breathe.

(*Voices heard off.*)

Saved! Saved! (*mops brow and throws himself into armchair below table* C. *and pretends to doze.*)
MRS. H. (*heard off*). Well, you're nice people to keep us waiting on the doorstep.
QUAYLE (*heard off*). Exceedingly sorry.
MRS. H. (*heard off*). I should think so.
QUAYLE (*heard off*). Most unfortunate.

(*Enter* MRS. HYACYNTH *followed by* SKEWS *and* QUAYLE.)

MRS. H. (*as she enters*). I'm not at all sure that I shall forgive you—and there (*pointing to* JACK), *look at him!* He dares to loll in an armchair while his poor wife plays an entire fantasia on the bell push. (*moves to back of armchair.*)

(SKEWS *and* QUAYLE *stand talking above table* C.)
JACK (*starting up, sleepily*). Hullo! is that you, darling?
MRS. H. Why on earth did you bolt the door?
JACK. The servants are out. (*rises and crosses* R.)

MRS. H. They've no business to be! (*moves a ep or two down* L.)

JACK. Oh! Clara wanted to see her mother.

MRS. H. (*turns*). She hasn't one.

JACK. Her father then.

MRS. H. She hasn't one.

JACK. What?

MRS. H. It sounds unnatural, but she happens to e an orphan.

JACK. Well, it was her uncle or cousin, or deceased ife's sister—I forget.

MRS. H. And Alice?

JACK. Oh! *she's* gone to the Empire.

MRS. H. What?

JACK. To the Hippodrome, I mean.

MRS. H. Why I let her go yesterday afternoon.

JACK. Exactly! She liked it so much, she's gone gain—and taken her sister.

MRS. H. Taken who?

JACK. Her married brother.

MRS. H. They seem to have favoured you with a ood deal of the family history.

JACK. Only a few details.

MRS. H. Well, I'm not at all pleased with either f you—I think you're both snuffy cats!

(SKEWS *now takes off his overcoat and places it on chair* R. *of small table up* L. QUAYLE *crosses to mantelpiece and furtively hides tin behind a photograph frame.*)

JACK. I'm awfully sorry, sweetheart.

MRS. H. (*crosses* R.C.) That's all very well. This night's work will cost you a lot of money.

JACK (*anxiously*). *Will* it?

MRS. H. It *will*. To-morrow you and I will go shopping in Dover Street.

JACK. All right, dear.

MRS. H. I want two frocks for Goodwood.

JACK. Yes.

MRS. H. And a new motor coat,

JACK. Anything else?

MRS. H. *Heaps* of things—that I can't mention before Billy and Mr. Quayle——

JACK. You'll leave me tuppence for the tube——won't you?

MRS. H. (*laughing and kissing* JACK). Oh! it was a woolly-headed Zulu, wasn't it?

JACK. You're looking splendid to-night, dear.

MRS. H. Billy gave me these flowers—aren't they sweet?

JACK. Charming.

MRS. H. Quick now, ask me what I've been doing and how I've enjoyed myself. I *never* did——(*Throws up her arms with a characteristic gesture and sits armchair below table.*)

JACK (*sits sofa*). How is it you're back so early?

(SKEWS *sits* R. *of card-table.* QUAYLE *stands by mantelpiece.*)

MRS. H. Well, first of all we dined at the Carlton——very good dinner, but very poggy people.

JACK. Really.

MRS. H. Simple, undiluted pog.

JACK. Oh!

MRS. H. The women glared and said, "Who is she?" The men stared, and said the same thing—in a different tone.

JACK. You were quite a success then?

SKEWS. Rather!

MRS. H. Then we went to the Prince's Theatre. It was a first night. Wasn't it ex-citing? Billy pointed out all the notabilities.

JACK. You must have left before the end.

MRS. H. Yes, we missed the booing. It *was* disappointing. I told Billy he ought to ask for his money back.

JACK. Why did you leave?

MRS. H. I had rather a headache, so like a dear boy, Billy brought me home after the first act.

JACK (*rises, and crosses between card-table and arm-chair, and stands above* MRS. HYACYNTH.) Ah! you'd better go to bed at once, dear.

MRS. H. (*rises, crosses* R. *and places cloak on sofa.*) I'm all right now—the fresh air has done me good.

JACK. Still, I think it would be wiser.

MRS. H. Jack, don't be fussy—let's play bridge.

SKEWS. Hurrah! Splendid! (*rises and taking books from card-table, places them on small table up* L.)

MRS. H. We're just four. Get out the cards, Jack.

JACK (L.C.). It's awfully late, Dicky.

MRS. H. (*by sofa*). It's only just ten.

JACK. But you're tired.

(SKEWS *removes table-cloth from card-table and stands up stage* L. *of window folding it up.*)

MRS. H. Not a bit. I feel as cheery as possible.

JACK. I'm awfully sleepy.

MRS. H. Go to bed then, darling. *I'm* going to sit up.

JACK (*crossly*). Oh! just as you like.

MRS. H. Jack! You seem very anxious I should go to bed.

JACK. Not at all; I thought it might be better for you, that's all. (*gets out cards and bridge markers.*)

MRS. H. Dear old thing. I'm all right. Get out the cards—quick!—like a swift hare.

JACK. Perhaps Skews is tired. (*counting the cards.*)

SKEWS (*who has placed table-cloth on small table at back*). Rather not.

JACK. Oh!

MRS. H. (*suddenly*). Why the men never fetched away the oak chest. (*she moves towards it.*)

(JACK *drops cards on floor by writing-table and rushes up* L. *of table to intercept her.*)

JACK (*standing by chest*). What men?

MRS. H. (*above sofa*). Why the men from Denton's. You surely remember you sold it.

JACK. No—I'd forgotten.

MRS. H. Dearest—where *is* your memory?

JACK. When are they coming to fetch it?

MRS. H. They were to have come this afternoon. Then they telephoned to ask if they might call for it this evening, so I left word with Clara. I can't *imagine* why they haven't been.

JACK (*relieved*). Ah, well, they won't come for it to-night.

MRS. H. No, it's rather too late now. (*pointing to cards.*) You've upset the cards, Jack; pick them up, there's a good boy.

JACK. I can't—I've ricked my back. (*standing firmly in front of chest.*)

MRS. H. What *have* you been doing to him, Mr. Quayle? You haven't been playing football, have you?

QUAYLE (*at fireplace*). No.

MRS. H. Perhaps you've had a political discussion?

QUAYLE. No.

MRS. H. Well, since nobody will pick up the cards, I suppose I must. Billy, you must help. (*moves down* R., *crosses below table and kneels* L.C.)

SKEWS. Right-o! (*moves down* L. *On the way he replaces armchair in its original position* L. *of table; kneels* L. *of* MRS. H. *and helps her to pick up the cards.* MRS. H. *turning her head suddenly sees* JACK *pantomiming to* QUAYLE*t.*)

MRS. H. My dear Jack, what *are* you waving at?

JACK (*irritably*). I suppose I can raise my hand if I like.

MRS. H. Naughty temper! (*still kneeling*). Come along, Billy.

(*They pick up cards*—QUAYLE *moves round and*

stands between them and the chest, holding out his frock coat by the lapels in order to form a screen.

JACK *opens the lid of box and* MRS. PERTWEE'S *head and shoulders appear*—JACK *whispers to her.*)

MRS. H. (*looking up sees* MR. QUAYLE). Mr. Quayle—what in the world are you doing?

QUAYLE (*gazing at the ceiling and trying to appear unconscious*). Nothing, nothing!

(MRS. PERTWEE *subsides into box and* JACK *closes lid.*)

MRS. H. (*laughing*). Oh! you're very funny birds! Do put your arms down, Mr. Quayle. I'm sure they must ache—and, Jack—where are you, Jack? I can't see you.

(JACK *hastily moves away from chest to sideboard and* QUAYLE *lowers his arms and returns to fireplace.*)

JACK. I was just looking to see if there was enough soda-water.

MRS. H. (*rising and moving to lower end of sofa*). I can easily get some more.

JACK (*stopping her*). No, no, there's plenty.

MRS. H. Very well, set the table, Jack—and give me a cigarette somebody. (*moves sofa rather more* C. *and sits.*)

SKEWS (*who has procured pack of cards and bridge-markers from writing-table, hurries forward with cigarette case*). Here, Mrs. Jack.

MRS. H. Thanks, Billy.

MRS. JACK *is seated lower end of sofa.* SKEWS, *with his left hand removes chair* R. *of table, pushes card-table close to sofa, replaces the chair he has disturbed above it, and the arm-chair* L. *of it. He then goes up to table* L.C. *to fetch match-stand for* MRS. HYACYNTH.)

How are we going to play—Jack?

JACK (*at sideboard, absently*). I beg your pardon.

MRS. H. Wake up, Jack. How shall we play?

JACK (*sullenly*). As you like.

MRS. H. Do *please* take some interest in the proceedings. What do you say, Mr. Quayle?

QUAYLE (L., *looking at watch*). I really think it's time I wished you good-night, Mrs. Hyacynth.

JACK (*crosses savagely to* QUAYLE). No, you don't—Quayle.

(SKEWS *comes down from table up* L. *with match-stand which he hands to* MRS. JACK.)

QUAYLE. It grows late!

JACK. You're a pretty friend, I must say.

QUAYLE. Well, of course, if you wish me to stop.

JACK (*savagely*). I insist on it. (*pushes him into chair* L. *of table.*)

QUAYLE (*with the air of a martyr*). Very well.

JACK. Of all the mean—— (*fetches chair from writing-table, places it below table and sits.*)

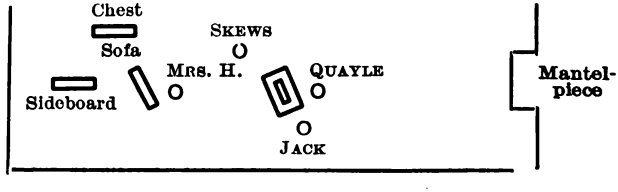
MRS. H. Jack, *dearest!* Mr. Quayle, will you play with me, and Billy, you play with Jack.

SKEWS. All right.

QUAYLE (*gloomily*). Most pleased.

(MRS. H. *is on sofa, facing her is* QUAYLE, *on her left is* SKEWS, *on her right is* JACK, *the table is set aslant, so that* JACK'S *profile is visible to the audience.*)

R. DIAGRAM OF SCENE. *L.*



MRS. H. I shall never leave you two to have a rollicking evening by yourselves again.

JACK. Rollicking!

QUAYLE. Rollicking!

MRS. H. Well, *wasn't* it rollicking?

JACK (*bitterly*). Very.

MRS. H. What did you do?

JACK. We talked—and cracked jokes—didn't we, Quayle?

QUAYLE. I cracked—oh! (*covers his face at the recollection of the beetles*). An awful one!

JACK (*contemptuously*). Tschah! Cut! You're getting quite dithery, Quayle.

MRS. H. You seem to have been cheery birds.

JACK (*snorting*). Hah! (*To* QUAYLE). Your deal.

(QUAYLE *deals.*)

MRS. H. What are we playing for?

JACK. Oh! anything.

MRS. H. Half-a-crown a hundred?

JACK. Suit you, Quayle?

QUAYLE (*absently*). Umph?

JACK (*roaring*). Half-a-crown a hundred?

MRS. H. Jack, dear, Mr. Quayle's not deaf.

JACK (*grunting*). Well, why doesn't he answer?

MRS. H. I'm afraid the cutlets must have been indigestible.

JACK (*shortly*). On the contrary—they were excellent.

MRS. H. *Something* seems to have ruffled you.

JACK (*irritably*). My dear child, one can't be always smiling like a moon calf! Get on, Quayle, you keep fooling over the cards like an old man of ninety.

(*By this time the cards are dealt—they each pick up their hands and look at them.* SKEWS *in doing so drops a card. He moves his chair back to* L. *so that he faces the chest. He then stoops, still seated, and picks up card. As he does so, he sees the lid of the chest slowly open and* MRS. PERTWEE'S *head and*

shoulders emerge. He watches this singular phenomenon petrified with astonishment.)

QUAYLE. I leave it to you, partner.

MRS. H. Hearts.

JACK (*to* SKEWS). May I play hearts, partner?

SKEWS (*moves his chair back, his eyes starting out of his head and mopping his brow with his handkerchief*). Well, I'm dashed!

MRS. H. Billy!

QUAYLE. My dear sir!

SKEWS. Sorry, some one spoke.

JACK. May I play to hearts?

SKEWS. Of all the extraordinary——

JACK. Come, come, *please!*

SKEWS (*dazed*). Eh?

JACK (*angrily*). Are we playing bridge or are we not?

SKEWS. Excuse me, am I awake?

JACK (*irritably*). You appear to be asleep.

MRS. H. (*sternly*). Now then, children, children.

JACK. I keep on asking—may I play to hearts and you continually change the subject.

SKEWS. Awfully sorry—yes, please, play to hearts.

(JACK *plays a card and* MRS. HYACYNTH *puts down her hand, which is played by* QUAYLE *who is dealer.* MRS. H. *rises.*)

MRS. H. (*aside*). I wonder where she is? (*moves down* R. *and then up* L. *of sofa to window,* C.) (*aside*) The curtains. (*moves to them.*) No, not there!

JACK (*to* MRS. H.) What are you doing, Dicky?

MRS. H. (*innocently.*) Only drawing the curtains, dear (*does so*). There's such a beautiful moon.

JACK. Won't you sit down, dear?

MRS. H. I'm going to mix the drinks.

JACK. We don't want drinks, do we, Quayle?

QUAYLE. No, no, certainly not.

MRS. H. (*at sideboard*). What nonsense! Of *course* you do. Hullo!

JACK (*starting*). What is it?

MRS. H. Why, you've had another visitor this evening.

JACK. What do you mean?

MRS. H. (*pointing*). Three tumblers!

JACK. Of course! One for you, one for Quayle—and one for me.

MRS. H. But they've all been used.

JACK. My dear child, Quayle poured out brandy by mistake, if you *must* know—please don't fidget about.

MRS. H. (*aside*). I think I'm getting warm. (*The men play*). The chest! I wonder! No, no impossible! (*moves towards chest.*)

JACK (*springing up*). Look here, Dicky, I simply can't play bridge if you *will* take exercise!

MRS. H. (*coming down* R. *of sofa, and gently pushing him back into chair*). Now, now, now! there—don't let me have any more trouble with you. (*she moves round to sideboard.*)

SKEWS. I say!

JACK (*starting*). What is it now?

SKEWS. You've trumped my ace!

JACK (*relieved*). Is that all? I thought something had happened.

SKEWS. Well, it's pretty rotten, isn't it?

JACK. (*savagely*). I apologise—do you hear?—I apologise—I can't do more.

SKEWS. Oh! it's all right.

JACK. I'm very much worried just now. (*during the preceding short dispute* MRS. H. *catches sight of a piece of lace scarf protruding from the chest. While the men's attention is engaged she pounces on it, examines it and nods exultantly.*)

MRS. H. Found! (*moves to sideboard.*) What's the matter, dear?

JACK. It's a long story—can't tell you now.

Bring us our drinks and for goodness sake sit down. The continual hissing of soda-water is getting on my nerves.

MRS. H. Darling, you seem very upset to-night—I thought you and Mr. Quayle would have had such a nice quiet evening together.

JACK (*hoarsely*). Quiet!

MRS. H. *Wasn't* it quiet?

JACK. Of course—that's just it. It was dull, deadly dull—so awfully dull that we nearly died of it.

MRS. H. (*brings two tumblers to head of table* L. *of* SKEWS). Well, I must say you're not very polite to Mr. Quayle.

JACK. He's an old friend. What's the good of an old friend, if you can't be rude to him?

QUAYLE. Exactly. (*To* JACK.) It's you to play.

JACK (*hand to his head*). What are trumps? (QUAYLE *silently hands him a whisky and soda.*) Thanks, thanks. (*Drinks—sees* MRS. H. *standing by sideboard, starts and chokes. Jumping up he shouts.*) What are you doing?

MRS. H. (*brings third tumbler and standing* L. *of* JACK *puts him back in his chair*). My dear Jack—you're not at all well. I shall take you to a specialist to-morrow.

JACK (*sits*). Absurd! I'm perfectly well. As cool as a cucumber. Only you keep wandering about—it worries me.

MRS. H. There, there. (*kisses him on the top of his head.*) Be your own calm, beautiful self. That's better.

JACK. I'm sorry I spoke so loudly, Dicky.

MRS. H. It doesn't matter, dear. I expect you fancied yourself in the Kaffir Market.

JACK. Perhaps.

MRS. H. Get on with the game. I never knew a deal take such a time to play. (*moves across to mantelpiece.*)

JACK. Let's see—it's me to lead.

SKEWS. Yes.

JACK (*to* SKEWS). Afraid I've given you a poor game, Skews—but my head's simply going round.

SKEWS. I should have a little plain soda-water if I were you.

JACK (*looks hard at him*). No, thanks.

MRS. H. (*at mantelpiece, examining the tin of beetle powder*). What on earth is *this* doing here?

JACK (*starting up and throwing down his cards, stands with his back to audience*). This is too much. These continual interruptions make bridge impossible. (*To* MRS. H.) You've completely spoilt our game. (*with a gesture of annoyance moves the chair he has vacated to his left.*)

MRS. H. (*holding out tin in her right hand*). But, darling, I merely asked why a tin of beetle powder was reposing on the drawing-room mantelpiece?

JACK (*with suppressed rage crosses to her*). And why not, pray? Why shouldn't a tin, or two tins, or ten tins rest on the mantelpiece. They are useful—they are ornamental, and they're exceedingly decorative.

MRS. H. *L'art nouveau*? of course—how stupid of me.

(*Bell rings*—JACK *starts violently.*)

JACK. What's that?

MRS. H. It's only Clara, dear—your nerves are perfectly dre-a-d-ful——

(SKEWS *rises to open door.*)

No, no, I'll let her in. You stay and stroke Jack down—he's very edgy to-night—if he's not all smiles when I return I shall be very annoyed with you both.

(*Exit* L.U.E.)

SKEWS (*crosses to* JACK). Mr. Hyacynth, I want to ask you a question.

JACK. Well?

SKEWS. Am I sober?

JACK. Apparently.

SKEWS. Am I imaginative?

JACK. I should think not.

SKEWS (*crosses down* L. *to writing-table*). Very well then—I've seen a ghost.

QUAYLE. Impossible. (*rises, and in so doing moves armchair slightly out from table* C. *He goes down* R.C.)

JACK. What are you driving at?

SKEWS (*turns*). It was while we were playing bridge.

JACK (L.C.). Yes?

SKEWS. (L.) As sure as I'm standing here, I saw the lid of that chest open and the figure of a woman rise out of it.

JACK (L.C.). Absurd!

QUAYLE (R.C.). Preposterous!

JACK. Why the chest is double locked.

SKEWS. It's true.

QUAYLE. You must have been dreaming.

JACK. Of course. Now, Skews, I particularly want you to see a new mezzotint—I've just hung in the dining-room. It's a beautiful specimen. Take him in and show it him, Quayle. (*turns* SKEWS *round.*)

QUAYLE. With pleasure. (QUAYLE *crosses and takes* SKEWS *by the left arm,* JACK *takes his right and between them they hustle him out.*)

SKEWS. It's awfully rummy.

JACK. I'll be with you in a moment.

(*They exeunt* R.U.E.)

JACK (*left alone, raises lid of chest*). Another minute and you'll be free. What? (*bends down.*) Yes, yes, I know. Keep still—hush! Take care! (*closes lid and moves down* C.)

(*Re-enter* MRS. HYACYNTH L.U.E.)

MRS. H. (*as she enters*). I hope you're feeling better, Jack!

JACK (*contritely*). Was I cross, dear?

MRS. H. Pretty snaggy.

JACK. Sorry.

MRS. H. (*kissing him*). It's all right! Where are the others?

JACK. In the dining-room.

MRS. H. Good. We'll join them. (*Bell rings.* MRS. H. *moves up to window quickly and looks out.* JACK *takes a cigarette from his case, moves to above table* C.—*his back turned to* MRS. H.—*and takes vesta from match-stand.*)

MRS. H. (*aside*). The van from Denton's! What fun. (*Pantomimes—indicates the chest, the van and the door* L.U.E. *Her face beams with smiles.*)

JACK. What is it, dear?

MRS. H. Nothing, Jack—just a minute! I want to speak to—Alice!

(*Exits* L.U.E.)

JACK (*left alone, raises lid of chest.*) How are you?

MRS. P. (*standing up*). Nearly dead! (*tries to get out.*)

JACK. No, no, you mustn't get out.

MRS. P. I *will*—I'll risk all——

JACK. My dear Mrs. Pertwee be brave—have patience, remember that I too have been on the rack!

MRS. P. But you haven't been in the *box*.

JACK. Stay where you are and in another two minutes you shall be free.

MRS. P. What am I to do?

JACK. Listen. Skews and Quayle are in the dining-room—my wife is talking to the servants. In a minute she will return. We shall then join the others in the dining-room. The servants will be in the kitchen, and you can make your escape in safety. Understand?

MRS. P. Yes.

JACK. One important point. Be careful not to let the lid fall to! If you do it will lock automatically and you will be a prisoner. (*noise is heard*). Hush! My wife! (MRS. PERTWEE *disappears*. JACK *moves down a step*. *Re-enter* MRS. HYACYNTH, L.U.E.)

MRS. H. It *has* been an amusing evening, hasn't it?

JACK (*doubtfully*). Has it?

MRS. H. Yes, come along—we mustn't neglect our guests.

(*They move towards door* R.U.E.)

JACK. Billy wanted to see the new mezzotint!

MRS. H. (*as they exit* R.U.E.) Why, Billy, what do you know about etchings?

SKEWS (*heard off*). Afraid I'm not much of a judge, don't you know.

(*The door closes, but the voices, and occasional laughter, can still be heard. Lid of chest is raised and* MRS. PERTWEE *steps out. She listens—then makes for door* L.U.E. *At the exit she stops alarmed. A sound of men's voices is heard.*)

MRS. P. Voices! Footsteps! Heavens—they're coming this way. (*Rushes back to chest, re-enters it and lets the lid fall to with a loud bang.*)

(*Enter* CLARA *shewing in two carmen from Denton's. They wear green baize aprons, and under* CLARA'S *directions they move quickly across to chest and carry it off* L.U.E., *as speedily as possible. While they are on* CLARA *continues to talk, but her dialogue is of no significance, and as little of it should be used as possible.*

MRS. HYACYNTH'S *cue for entrance should be the exit of the carmen. The play must now move very swiftly to the end of act.*)

CLARA. (*stands up* C.) A pretty time to come and fetch furniture. (*The men cross in front of her, raise and carry off chest.*) Why didn't you come before? Now don't stand chattering there. Be quick! I

shall be glad to see the last of it; and of you too! Hurry up! You're very slow for auctioneers—a pair of grinning monkeys!

(*Exeunt men with chest* L.U.E.)

(*Enter* MRS. HYACYNTH *quickly from* R.U.E.)

MRS. H. (*as she hurries in*). All right, Clara! I've told them exactly what to do!

CLARA. Very good, ma'am. (*Exit* CLARA L.U.E.)

(MRS. H. *dances down* L. *wild with delight.*)

MRS. H. Oh! the cat!—the cat!—the cat! (*calls.*) Billy! Billy! Oh! the nasty, snuffy cat!

(*Enter* BILLY *quickly* R.U.E.; *he runs to her down* L.)

MRS. H. Billy, I want to dance! to dance! to dance! (*She whirls him round in a mad waltz.*)

(*Re-enter* JACK *and* QUAYLE *from dining-room.* L.U.E.)

JACK (*laughs and moves to above table* C.). Dicky, what on earth are you doing? (QUAYLE *stands by sideboard.*)

MRS. H. (*laughing and panting sinks into chair* L. *of table*). Oh! I'm quite giddy!

(JACK *turns and misses chest. His face falls.*)

JACK (*anxiously*). Where's the chest?

MRS. H. It's gone.

JACK (*aghast*). Gone?

MRS. H. Gone to be sold by auction!

(JACK *and* QUAYLE *turn and look at each other blankly,* MRS. H. *watches them with the sweetest of smiles,* SKEWS *selects a cigarette from his case with a somewhat puzzled expression.*)

(QUICK CURTAIN.)

ACT III.

SCENE. *The same. Morning of the next day. The weather is very bright and fine, and the sunshine streams in through the window. Sofa to be moved up to space vacated by the oak chest. With this exception the furniture is now replaced as in Act I.*

(MRS. HYACYNTH *is discovered seated at* R. *of table* C., *idly turning over the pages of a novel. The electric bell rings.* MRS. HYACYNTH *looks up expectantly.*)

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E.)

MRS. H. Who is it, Clara?

CLARA. Mr. Skews, ma'am.

MRS. H. Show him in.

CLARA. Yes, ma'am.

(*Exit* L.U.E.)

(MRS. HYACYNTH *returns to her novel.*)

(*Without.*) Mrs. Hyacynth is in the drawing-room.

SKEWS (*without*). Thank you.

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E., *followed by* SKEWS.)

CLARA. Mr. Skews, ma'am.

SKEWS (*cheerily*). Morning, Mrs. Jack. (*Crosses to above table* C., *and shakes hands.*)

MRS. H. Good-morning, Billy! You *are* a dear boy to come so early. Find a chair and tell me all about everything.

(*He places his hat on small table up* L., *then moves down* L. *to front of table* C.)

SKEWS. It's been a great time. Oh! by the way, I hope you won't mind, but I'm not wearing your boots to-day.

MRS. H. Why not, Billy?

SKEWS. Somehow dove-coloured tops seemed out of place in an auction-room.

MRS. H. Too light-hearted, you thought?

SKEWS. Exactly. I fancied these more suited to the occasion. (*stands on one leg and shows boot with dark tan top.*) I wear these when I'm lunching with my people.

MRS. H. Quite nice, Billy.

SKEWS (*relieved*). *That's* all right. (*sits* L. *of table* C.)

MRS. H. Now tell me all about the auction. You saw Jack, of course?

SKEWS (*laughing*). Rather.

MRS. H. Anybody else?

SKEWS. Quayle.

MRS. H. Oh! was *he* there?

SKEWS. Yes. (*laughing.*) You never saw such wrecks.

MRS. H. (*half-regretfully*). Poor old Jack!

SKEWS. Before the sale started people went round and examined things. They appeared to have *nearly* bought everything. When a picture was bid for one would whisper—"See that picture—I *nearly* bought that!" or another would say, "See that cabinet—I *nearly* bought that." But they never got any further.

MRS. H. (*laughing*). Go on, Billy.

SKEWS. Well, at last we came to *our* little lot. (*takes out catalogue.*) Here it is. "Property of a Deceased Nobleman.

"Suit of chain armour.

"Ancient broadsword.

"Arquebus.

"Helmet and pike.

"Two pairs of gauntlets.

"A longbow.

"Suite of bedroom furniture in excellent prese vation.

"An oil painting reputed to be by an old Dutc master."

Here we are!

"A very handsome, dark oak chest, elaboratel carved, reported to have been presented to th late owner by the Emperor of China."

MRS. H. (*laughing*). How lovely!

SKEWS. When we reached that point, Mr. Hya cynth sprang to his feet. (*rises and stands at back o chair.*) So did I. He hadn't noticed me before, o account of the crowd. "How much for this?" aske the auctioneer. "£5," cried Mr. Hyacynth. "Ten, I shouted. He glared at me and bid fifteen "Twenty!" I cried! By fives and tens we'd reache a hundred in a twinkling. People began to get excited Hyacynth was streaming with perspiration. At tw hundred I thought he was going to faint. At tw fifty the auctioneer became emotional. At two sixt a woman had to be carried out. The bidding mounte higher and higher. Going—going, it nearly went a £280. But you'd told me to bid till all was blue, s on I went. "Two ninety," shouted Hyacynt "Three hundred," I yelled. The crowd fairly buzze with excitement. Three twenty—I'd nearly reache my limit. Three thirty, forty, fifty! "Three sixty roared Hyacynth. Going, going—gone! (*Climax*

MRS. H. (*anxiously*). My dear Billy, you don mean to say that you ran poor Jack up £360.

SKEWS. I do though. Wasn't it a rag? (*mov down a step or two.*)

MRS. H. (*doubtfully.*) Y-e-es! yes, I suppose i was.

SKEWS. You told me to go on till all was blue!

MRS. H. Yes, my bird, but I didn't realize that blue was such an expensive colour.

SKEWS (L. *of table*). I'm awfully sorry——

MRS. H. It's all right, Billy. It was my fault.

Never mind. I'll save it out of the housekeeping, or perhaps I'll back a winner, or buy in a rising market.

SKEWS. Is there some secret about that chest, Mrs. Jack? (*moves up* L. *and stands above table* C.)

MRS. H. Why?

SKEWS. I wondered if it was haunted.

MRS. H. Haunted!

SKEWS. Last night I thought I saw some one raise the lid.

MRS. H. Did you?

SKEWS. Yes—a woman.

MRS. H. Billy!—it may have been the family skeleton.

SKEWS. I never thought of that!

MRS. H. Family skeletons, you know, are not always kept in cupboards.

SKEWS. You're not sick with me about the auction, Mrs. Jack?

MRS. H. Of course not, Billy.

(PAUSE. SKEWS *sits on upper end of table, his back half turned to audience.*)

SKEWS. Mrs. Jack, you don't like any other fellow better than me—*do* you?

MRS. H. I don't know.

SKEWS. (*crushed*). Oh!

MRS. H. Until the day is well aired I'm not sure of my mood or my gown. Sometimes I'm grey; sometimes rose pink; at other times black. Occasionally yellow, intermittently dull white; more often than not, a blend of all.

SKEWS. You're the most fascinating woman I ever met.

MRS. H. How old are you, Billy?

SKEWS. Twenty-three.

MRS. H. Before you're thirty you'll have said that often. At forty you'll repeat it with increasing frequency. At fifty you'll say it to every woman you meet. And be sure of one thing, Billy.

SKEWS. What?

MRS. H. They'll all believe it!

SKEWS. It will never be true of any one but you.

MRS. H. Possibly not; but you'll say it all the same.

SKEWS. Never!

MRS. H. Billy, you're rather a dear, and sometimes I like to talk nonsense.

(*Bell rings.*)

SKEWS. Hang it! (*Rises and goes up* C.)

MRS. H. (*with a tantalizing smile.*) And I was feeling almost—*almost* sentimental.

SKEWS (*returns fervently*). Mrs. Jack!

MRS. H. Hush! Clara!

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E.)

Who is it, Clara?

CLARA. Mr. Quayle, ma'am.

MRS. H. (*surprised*). Mr. Quayle!

CLARA. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. H. Why on earth is Mr. Quayle calling at this hour—eh, Clara?

CLARA (*smiling*). I don't *know*, m'm.

MRS. H. (*suddenly*). Oh! (*rises and goes down* R., *intensely amused.*) O-o-oh!—how funny! Of course! (*To* CLARA.) Show him in.

CLARA. Yes, m'm.

(*Exit* L.U.E.)

MRS. H. Billy, ask me to lunch. (*A few steps up* R.)

SKEWS. Rather. (*comes to above her* R.C.)

MRS. H. Sounds rather cool; but unless I'm much mistaken, Mr. Quayle will invite me to lunch within the next ten minutes, and I want to guard against that awful possibility.

(NOTE.—*It must be clearly shown that* MRS. HYACYNTH *at once grasps the significance of* MR. QUAYLE'S *visit.*)

SKEWS. It'll be rippin'!

(*Re-enter* CLARA L.U.E., *followed by* MR. QUAYLE.)

CLARA. Mr. Quayle.

(*Exit* CLARA L.U.E.)

QUAYLE (*pale and bilious*). How d'ye do, Mrs. Hyacynth?

MRS. H. (*crosses up* C.). Good-morning, Mr. Quayle; you're looking quite pale! Anything the matter?

QUAYLE (*grunting.*) No, no, merely indigestion. (*Places hat on table up* L.)

SKEWS (*down* R.). We've met before.

QUAYLE (*comes down* L.). We *have.*

SKEWS. Wasn't it a rag!

QUAYLE. I beg your pardon.

SKEWS. Wasn't it a joke!

QUAYLE. Humph! Are you a judge of antique furniture?

SKEWS. Not much.

QUAYLE. Then why, may I ask——

SKEWS. Oh! I was bidding for a friend. (*with a glance at* MRS. H. *moves up* R. *and round to above table* C.)

QUAYLE. Oh! indeed!

MRS. H. (*at back of chair* R. *of table*). There seems to be a perfect craze for old oak just now. That dear old chest has been reposing here for *ages*, without causing any wild excitement. Yet no sooner is it put up for auction, than the whole world is seized with a frantic desire to possess it! (*moves to front of chair.*)

QUAYLE. One can't explain these things!

MRS. H. (*sits and speaks with meaning*). No, it's rather difficult, isn't it? Oh! (*springs to her feet and moves* R.)

QUAYLE (*startled*). Good gracious!

MRS. H. (*turns*). Suppose it contained a buried treasure!

QUAYLE (*protesting*). Really!

MRS. H. (*excitedly*). Suppose it contained a thousand pounds in gold!

QUAYLE. Above all things, let us keep calm.

MRS. H. Calm! Ah, but you're a man! You don't know what divine things you can buy for £1,000.

QUAYLE. I can only conjecture! (*sits* L. *of table* C.)

MRS. H. (*shocked*). Mr. Quayle! I believe you read the advertisements in the *Lady's Pictorial*? (*sits* R. *of table* C.)

(SKEWS *moves round to writing-table down* L.)

QUAYLE (*throwing up his hands.*) No, no!

MRS. H. How perfectly dre-a-dful!

QUAYLE (*protesting*). I assure you——

MRS. H. Of course, I must believe you—*but* (*shakes her head at him*).

QUAYLE (*coughs*).

MRS. H. I suppose Denton's men will bring the chest home shortly.

QUAYLE (*confused*). I—er—don't know.

MRS. H. Don't you?

QUAYLE. No!

MRS. H. (*thoughtfully*). I ought really to be here to receive it.

QUAYLE. Oh! it's not at all necessary.

MRS. H. But they won't know where to put it.

QUAYLE. They're—they're experienced men!

MRS. H. Still, I should be happier if I pointed out the exact spot.

QUAYLE. Believe me, you can trust them absolutely.

MRS. H. Are you sure?

QUAYLE. Quite, quite! (*rises and stands in front of armchair,* L. *of table*). And now let me come to the reason of my visit.

MRS. H. Ah! yes, you're very festive to-day. First you attend a sale at Denton's—somehow I don

place you at an auction. Had it been a court of law! Had there been— (*pointedly*)—a witness in the box!

QUAYLE (*falls back into armchair*). My dear madam——

MRS. H. And then, after such a debauch—you honour me with a morning call.

QUAYLE. I came in point of fact to proffer you an invitation to lunch.

MRS. H. (*overwhelmed*). Oh! Mr. Quayle!

QUAYLE. At Prince's! or any restaurant that appealed to you.

MRS. H. Oh! but this is *too* charming of you.

QUAYLE (*pompous cough*). Not at all, not at all! I should esteem it a high honour.

MRS. H. (*eyes twinkling*). But, Mr. Quayle!

QUAYLE (*grunt*). Yes?

MRS. H. Would it be proper?

QUAYLE (*surprised*). Proper?

MRS. H. Wouldn't people talk?

QUAYLE. Talk?

MRS. H. Would it be quite right for a married woman to lunch alone with a fascinating bachelor?

QUAYLE. I confess, I had not viewed it in that light.

MRS. H. (*innocently*). I thought you were rather great on that subject, Mr. Quayle?

QUAYLE. In the abstract, yes!

MRS. H. I must say I think you're rather naughty!

QUAYLE. We should be well chaperoned.

MRS. H. By whom?

QUAYLE. There would be the waiters!

MRS. H. I see your views are broadening. In fact, you're getting almost skitty. Some other time I shall be delighted, but to-day I'm lunching with Billy.

QUAYLE (*eagerly*). You're going out then?

MRS. H. Yes. (*rises and moves up* R. *to* C.)

(QUAYLE *beams.*)

It's rather a fag though. Why shouldn't we stay at home?

QUAYLE (*rises and joins her up* C.). I shouldn't, if I were you.

MRS. H. You want me to go out?

QUAYLE. Yes. Much better.

MRS. H. Almost looks as if you wanted to get rid of me.

QUAYLE. My dear lady!

MRS. H. If not, why am I dragged kicking and screaming to lunch?

QUAYLE (*moves a few steps towards window* C.). Glorious day, bright sun, blue sky, balmy breeze — never do to stay indoors.

MRS. H. Seems rather a pity to have spent the whole morning in an auction-room!

QUAYLE. That was business. After business pleasure. Let me implore you to start at once.

MRS. H. (*calmly*). Oh! there's no hurry. (*crosses down* L. *of table.*)

QUAYLE (*desperately*). But there is, dear lady, there *is*.

MRS. H. One can lunch till three o'clock. (*sits* L. *of table.*)

QUAYLE. The weather may change.

MRS. H. You think there's going to be a storm?

QUAYLE. Possibly, possibly!

MRS. H. There *does* seem to be thunder in the air! (*to* BILLY). What hat shall I wear, my bird?

BILLY. Oh, the chiffony thing, with the thingummys on the top.

MRS. H. (*rises and moves* C.). The ignorance of these men. I shan't be a minute. Have a cigarette, Mr. Quayle. You know where they are, Billy.

(*Exits* R.I.E., *into bedroom.*)

(SKEWS *takes up cigarette box from writing-table.*)

SKEWS. Will you smoke, Mr. Quayle?

QUAYLE. No, thank you—never smoke before lunch.

SKEWS. Don't you. (*moves to window.*) What waste of time. How's the weather? Hullo! I believe it's going to rain.

QUAYLE. Nonsense!

SKEWS. It's very black.

QUAYLE. Absurd.

SKEWS. Look at the sky.

QUAYLE. I never look at the sky. I tap the barometer. Far more trustworthy.

(*Re-enter* MRS. H. *Her hat is on and she carries gloves and a parasol.*)

MRS. H. What are you two talking about?

QUAYLE (*up* C.) Nothing at all—now then, are you ready?

MRS. H. Haven't I been quick?

QUAYLE. Remarkably. (SKEWS *gets his hat and gloves from small table up* L. *and stands ready by door* L.U.E.)

MRS. H. What are you going to do with yourself, Mr. Quayle?

QUAYLE. I rather wanted to speak to your husband.

MRS. H. Why, you've only just left him.

QUAYLE. No chance of talking business in the auction-room.

MRS. H. No?

QUAYLE. None at all.

MRS. H. Well, I expect he'll be in soon.

QUAYLE (*grunting*). Then I'll wait a few minutes if I may.

MRS. H. By all means. I hope you'll find him in a good temper. He was rather snaggy this morning. *Au 'voir!* (*crosses* L.C., *then turns.*) If the box *should* arrive while you're here——

QUAYLE. It's—er—hardly probable!

MRS. H. (*with meaning*). No, it's not very likely, is it? Still it *might*—mightn't it?

QUAYLE. It—er—might!

MRS. H. You'll tell them exactly where to put it?

QUAYLE. Certainly.

MRS. H. (*going*). Thank you *so* much. Come along, Billy. Where are you going to take me?

SKEWS. Grill room at the Carlton?

MRS. H. (*as they go out*). Something *much* more exciting than that!

(*Exeunt* L.U.E.)

(QUAYLE *mops his brow, then searches in small revolving bookcase up* R. *Re-enter* MRS. HYACYNTH L.U.E. *She moves* C.)

MRS. H. I quite forgot——

(QUAYLE *starts round.*)

Be sure and see they don't bump it.

QUAYLE. Of course, of course.

MRS. H. *That's* all right. Good-bye!

(*Exit* L.U.E.)

(QUAYLE *resumes his search. Re-enter* MRS. H.)

MRS. H. I believe it's going to rain.

QUAYLE. No, no!

MRS. H. I came back for my umbrella!

QUAYLE. My dear madam, you're unduly apprehensive. My barometer points to set fair.

MRS. H. You really think, then, I can risk the parasol?

QUAYLE. I'm sure of it.

MRS. H. Very well. It will be your fault if my hat's ruined. By the way, do you want anything?

QUAYLE. Eh?

MRS. H. I thought you were searching for something.

QUAYLE. Only the *British Pharmacopœia!*

MRS. H. Oh! I haven't read that—is it quite proper?

QUAYLE. I believe so.

MRS. H. I'm glad to hear it. Well, I mustn't keep Billy waiting—(*going*)—you remember exactly where they're to put the chest and that they're not to bump it, or knock the paint off the wall (*calling through door*)—I'm coming, Billy. (*comes back.*) Or do anything dre-a-dful! Furniture men are sometimes *so* careless—aren't they! Now I must fly like a swift hare. *Au 'voir!*

(*Exit quickly* L.U.E.)

(*Her voice is heard without and then the hall door closes. Meanwhile* QUAYLE *rings the bell below fireplace and moves to window.*)

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E.)

CLARA. Did you ring, sir?

QUAYLE (*turning with a start*). Yes—do you know if Mr. Hyacynth possesses any medical works?

CLARA. I don't know as I do, sir.

QUAYLE. Dear me, how unfortunate.

CLARA. Alice takes the *Family Doctor*, sir.

QUAYLE. Does she?

CLARA. She used to take the *Hospital*, but she finds the *Doctor* more gossipy.

QUAYLE. May I borrow a copy?

CLARA. Certainly, sir.

QUAYLE. Thank you.

(CLARA *going.*)

Stay, has your master a medicine chest?

CLARA. Don't you feel well, sir?

QUAYLE. Oh! perfectly—I merely asked out of curiosity. Get me the paper, will you?

CLARA. Yes, sir.

(*Exit* L.U.E.)

(QUAYLE, *left alone, returns to window, looks at watch, fidgets and crosses down* R. *Re-enter* CLARA *with paper.*)

CLARA. The paper, sir. (*moves to below table* C.)

QUAYLE. Thank you. (*takes it.*)

CLARA. Alice wishes me to say, sir, as there was a chatty article on appendicitis on page 10.

QUAYLE. Ah!

CLARA. And on page 5 there's a nice bit about chest trouble.

QUAYLE. Chest trouble! Show me where!

(CLARA *indicates the place. While they stand below table* C. *looking over paper* HYACYNTH *enters* L.U.E., *pale and haggard.*)

(*The following scenes must be played by all concerned with the utmost seriousness. There must be no attempt to be funny.*)

JACK (*coming down to writing-table,* L.; *coldly*). I'm afraid I interrupt you.

CLARA (*starting*). Lor', sir!

QUAYLE. I asked her to bring me the *Family Doctor.*

JACK. Why?

QUAYLE. In view—in view of contingencies.

JACK (*with a gasp*). Ah! That will do, Clara.

(*Exit* CLARA L.U.E.)

(*Crosses* L.C., *anxiously*). What news?

QUAYLE. Bad, I'm afraid.

JACK (*impatiently*). Go on!

QUAYLE. I've been upstairs.

JACK. Well?

QUAYLE. Nothing has been heard of Mrs. Pertwee since she left for Hampstead.

JACK (*with a gasp*). Ah!

QUAYLE. The servants wanted to wire to Pertwee at Ealing.

JACK. You stopped them?

QUAYLE. Till they'd seen you.

JACK. That's a respite.

QUAYLE. They were in a terrible stew.

JACK. They were half frantic when *I* called! I shall never forget it. Till that moment I quite be lieved that Mrs. Pertwee had escaped. At the worst I thought she might have been carried into the van—then a few vigorous kicks on the lid and the carmen would have liberated her. (*slowly.*) But from the time she left this room she has not been seen or heard of. Oh! It's awful! (*sits at writing-table.*)

QUAYLE. I've managed to get your wife out of the way!

JACK. Where is she?

QUAYLE. Lunching with Skews.

JACK. Young fool—confound him! What did he want to bid against *me* for?

QUAYLE. He described it as a rag!

JACK (*rises savagely*). Oh! he did, did he? (*crosses* R.) I'll "rag" him. By Gad, I'll take the skin off him—I'll give him the biggest hiding he ever had, I'll——

QUAYLE (*moving to* JACK, R.) Above all things let us keep calm!

JACK. Sit down! (*savagely*). Sit down! (QUAYLE *much alarmed moves backwards and sinks into chair* R. *of table.*) You advise me to keep calm. *You,* who have brought me to the verge of ruin—*you* who have wrecked this happy home—*you* whose insensate folly may place me in the felon's dock! *You* advise me to keep calm!

QUAYLE. My dear——!

JACK (*hissing the words through his teeth*). *Listen!* If you see my hand wandering towards your throat—check it, Quayle!

QUAYLE (*fervently*). I will!

JACK. If my expression leads you to suppose that the next moment will be your last—check it, Quayl

QUAYLE. I will.

JACK (*running to window*). Why don't they co

QUAYLE. Denton's people?

JACK (*turning savagely*). Who else? Who else? (*strides towards* QUAYLE.)

QUAYLE. Check it, Hyacynth!

JACK (*pulling himself together*). Ah! (*moves* R.)

QUAYLE (*rises and creeps to below table* C.) She may be none the worse for it.

JACK. What! After spending a night in a hermetically closed box, without air, food or water! Quayle! (*moves to* R. *of table.*)

QUAYLE. Yes.

JACK. I shall swing for it. (*sits* R. *of table.*)

QUAYLE. No, no!

JACK. I remember—it seems but yesterday!—when, as a happy little boy, I tore the back of my knickers, my nurse used to say that naughty children were always hanged.

QUAYLE. She was a pessimist.

JACK. No, she wasn't! She was a Primitive Methodist—and spoke the truth.

QUAYLE. It doesn't follow.

JACK. Tschah! (*rises, moves towards* QUAYLE.)

QUAYLE. Check it, Hyacynth! (*sinks into chair* L. *of table*).

JACK (*leans over table and speaks with intensity*). Quayle, you can't imagine the luxury it would be to me, to violently assault you. (*moves up* R.C.)

QUAYLE. I admit that my scheme has not achieved the unclouded success I anticipated, still——

JACK (*wildly*). Hah! (*moves to chair* R. *of table* C.) Why don't the men come! And yet—I dread to see them. The thought turns me cold! I—I can't bear it, Quayle! (*sinks into chair.*)

QUAYLE (*soothingly*). My dear Hyacynth. Pull yourself together.

JACK. I'm all to pieces! Give me brandy.

QUAYLE. Yes, yes. (*rises and moves round table to sideboard* R.)

JACK. Quayle—do me a last favour.

QUAYLE (*pouring out brandy.*) Certainly, certainly, anything.

JACK. Open the box.

QUAYLE. My dear fellow, anything, anything but that!

JACK (*bitterly*). Ah! I thought so. Never mind, give me the brandy.

QUAYLE (*hands glass*). Drink it off.

JACK (*drinks it at a gulp*). That's better.

(*The bell rings.* JACK *starts up and rushes to* L.)

JACK (*frantic*). The police! They're after me!

QUAYLE. Nonsense!

(*Enter* CLARA L.U.E.)

JACK (*hoarsely*). Who is it, Clara?

CLARA. The men from Denton's, sir!

JACK (*with a gasp*). Ah! Show—show them in.

(*Exit* CLARA L.U.E.)

(*crosses up* C.) Quayle—another moment and I shall know my fate! Which is it? Sink or swim? Eh? Tell me that!

QUAYLE. Hush! they're coming. (*Jack moves down to writing-table.*)

(*Enter Carmen* L.U.E., *carrying on the oak chest. Directed by* QUAYLE *they place it down* R. *Then they return and stand expectantly by door* L.U.E.)

JACK (*impatiently*). Well, what are you waiting for?

(*Men indicate that a tip would be welcome. Jack gives them money and they exeunt* L.U.E.)

JACK (*savagely*). Slow asses!

QUAYLE. Quick, every moment is precious.

JACK. Yes—yes—I must keep my head—I——(*moves down* L. *and crosses* C. *Suddenly turns and sees* QUAYLE *watching him*). What are you staring at?

You look as if you'd seen a ghost! Can't you be bright and cheerful, like I am!

QUAYLE. I think, if you don't mind, I'll look out of the window, and hum a little song. (*moves up to window* C.)

JACK (*with a ghastly smile*). Yes, I may need slow music!

QUAYLE (*at window*). Call me if you want me (*turns his back*).

JACK. Ah! (*moves to chest, taps it, listens, staggers from it; returns, pulls himself together, and finally opens the lid with his eyes closed. At last he looks in, and then with a cry staggers to table and sinks into chair* R. *of it, resting his head on his left arm.*)

QUAYLE (*turning*). Good heavens! (*comes down, gasps.*) Hyacynth! Hyacynth! Is—it—the worst (*shaking him*). Speak, man!

JACK (*sitting up*). Quayle—*she's not there!*

QUAYLE (*exasperated*). Confound it, Hyacynth—you nearly frightened the life out of me.

JACK. Where can she be?

QUAYLE (*crossly*). I've not the slightest idea! (*moves to writing-table.*)

JACK. She's not in the chest; she's not upstairs, then where the devil is she?

QUAYLE. How can *I* tell?

(*Enter* CLARA, L.U.E. *She moves* C.)

CLARA. A lady wishes to see you, sir.

JACK. Certainly not—send her away!

CLARA. She says as she must, sir!

JACK. Absurd! I won't see her.

(*Enter* MRS. PERTWEE, *with bent head. She wears a Salvation Army bonnet and cloak and is thus completely disguised. Underneath, is the evening dress of the previous night, now very draggled and dirty.*)

JACK. Really, madam, this is a most unwarrantable intrusion!

QUAYLE. Entirely out of order and unprecedented.

JACK. Some other day I shall be most happy, but at the present moment I'm far too busy.

MRS. P. (*moving to below table* C.). I think you'd better! (*She throws back her bonnet with a jerk of the head.*)

JACK (*suddenly recognizing* MRS. PERTWEE). Great ——! That will do, Clara.

(*Exit* CLARA L.U.E.)

JACK (*seizing her hand*). Mrs. Pertwee! Thank Heaven! I was never so pleased to see any one in the whole course of my life.

MRS. P. I have been maltreated, insulted, and nearly sold at an auction.

JACK (R.C.). I know, I know, but, my dear Mrs. Pertwee, if you only knew the intense relief it is to see you again! I really feel as if I could——

MRS. P. No; all is at an end between us!

JACK. Ah! well, we won't trouble about that—the great point is that you're alive. (*shakes her violently by the hand.*)

MRS. P. By a miracle!

JACK. The whole thing has been a terrible muddle, but when I tell you what I've suffered, and the money it has cost me, I feel sure you'll forgive me.

MRS. P. I may forgive *you*—but your wife, never! *She* was the arch conspirator. To her I owe my humiliation. Oh! if I could only have revenge.

JACK. Why didn't you escape as I arranged?

MRS. P. I couldn't. I was carried from this room and deposited in a van. I tried in vain to open the lid. I was jolted and shaken and rattled and battered. Suddenly I heard a voice say: "H'Arthur, where was we to let 'er out?" Then came the reply, "Dook Street, *Mrs. 'Yacnyth* said."

JACK. Impossible.

MRS. P. Your *wife* planned this abominable outrage——

JACK. But——

MRS. P. I gave the men my purse, pledged them to secrecy, and slipped off the van. Half-dazed I lost my way and wandered about for hours. I'd no money to take a cab and no latchkey. At length, footsore and half dead I reached a Salvation Army Shelter. They succoured me and gave me—a doss! And this morning they lent me these clothes to come home in! Oh! (*groans.*)

JACK. My dear Mrs. Pertwee, this is most distressing.

MRS. P. Revenge! That is all I ask!

JACK. You must be mistaken about my wife.

QUAYLE. No, I feel sure she's right.

JACK. Dicky may be to blame to a certain extent, but the author of all our troubles—the originator of the whole imbroglio, stands there! (*points to* QUAYLE.)

QUAYLE. Me!

JACK. Yes, *you!*

QUAYLE. Really, really!

JACK (*crosses to him,* L). You deny it?

QUAYLE. Check it, Hyacynth!

JACK (*turns,* C.). Tschah!

QUAYLE (L.). This is a side issue. The real point is, how can we best turn the tables on Mrs. Hyacynth?

JACK (L.C.). I suppose she thinks she's scored!

QUAYLE. Undoubtedly.

JACK. Her little joke has cost me £360.

MRS. P. (C.). Hopelessly ruined my frock!

QUAYLE (L.). To say nothing of our agony of mind.

JACK. Well, we'll reverse the situation! She has frightened *us,* now we'll get a bit of our own back.

MRS. P. How?

JACK. Wait and see.

(*Bell rings.*)

There she is! Quick, get behind that curtain. (*takes her up to window,* C.). There you can see and hear everything.

(MRS. PERTWEE *hides behind curtain.* QUAYLE *crosses* R.)

JACK (*comes down* R. *of table and stands* L. *of* QUAYLE.) We'll teach her a lesson, Quayle!

QUAYLE. Yes, don't spare her!

JACK. I don't want to be unkind.

QUAYLE. No weakness—rub it in.

JACK. Don't be afraid.

QUAYLE. No punishment could be too severe.

JACK. Still we mustn't go too far.

QUAYLE. Nonsense—there's no length to which I wouldn't go!

JACK. Hush!

(*Enter* MRS. HYACYNTH L.U.E., *very smiling and bright and cheerful.*)

MRS. H. Talking secrets! You both look as if you were hatching a gunpowder plot! I hope it won't go off at the wrong time and blow up the wrong people. (*takes off hat and places it on writing-table down* L.)

JACK (*gravely*). Dicky—something has happened!

MRS. H. Oh! don't put on that woebegone air Be your own bright, beautiful self!

JACK (C.). I shall never smile again!

MRS. H. (*sits at writing-table*). Then, my dear Jack, I shall get a divorce. I decline to be married to a tragedian. They're bad enough on the stage!

JACK (*with mock solemnity*). You will soon be free.

MRS. H. Oh! this is *most* depressing! Billy was inclined to be humpy so I dropped him at the Bath Club, and now I find you in the dumps too!

JACK. Dicky, listen!

MRS. H. (*smiling*). Well?

JACK. I've something serious to tell you.

MRS. H. (*ceasing to smile*). What?

JACK. Mrs. Pertwee is reported missing.

MRS. H. Since when?

JACK. Since last night!

MRS. H. Do you mean to say she's not in her flat?

JACK. Yes.

MRS. H. Rubbish! (*laughing.*) You're talking through your hat, Jack!

JACK. I'm quite serious.

MRS. H. (*grave, then laughingly*). It's no use trying to frighten me.

JACK. She has not returned home since she left for Hampstead.

MRS. H. Nonsense!

JACK. It's the truth.

(*Enter* CLARA *hurriedly* L.U.E.)

CLARA. Please, sir, they're in a terrible way upstairs. Mrs. Pertwee has been out all night. The servants have sent down to know what to do?

JACK (*to* MRS. H.). Do you believe me now?

MRS. H. (*getting alarmed*). Oh! but this is dreadful—dreadful!

JACK (*to* CLARA). Tell the servants I'll come in a minute.

(CLARA *exits* L.U.E.)

MRS. H. Jack! Mr. Quayle! Run like swift hares—something must be done at once! She may be hidden. (*rushes to chest.*) Have you looked?

JACK (L.). I fear the worst.

MRS. H. Oh! don't say that—oh! my poor, dear old Jack—what have I done? I feel—like a criminal!—and it's such a nice sunny day too! (*down* R.)

QUAYLE (*solemnly*). It's a bad business.

MRS. H. (*savagely*). Ah! don't stand nodding your head like a boiled owl. (*wringing her hands.*) Whatever shall I do?

(JACK *and* QUAYLE *exchange glances.*)

JACK (*quietly*). I shall probably be hanged!

MRS. H. (*crosses to him and throws her arms round him*). Then I'll be hanged too.

JACK. No, no, the authorities wouldn't allow it.

MRS. H. (*crosses back* C.). Oh! I'll *make* them. (*takes stage wildly*). I'll petition the Home Secretary, I'll bombard the Judges, I'll hypnotize the jury—I'll ——(*catches sight of* MRS. PERTWEE, *who is peeping from behind the curtains* C. *Stops, bursts into an hysterical peal of laughter, then rests her head on* JACK'S *right shoulder.*)

JACK (*relenting*). Dicky, Dicky!

MRS. H. (*getting calmer*). All right, Jack, I'm better now.

JACK. We must hope for the best, you know.

MRS. H. (*still tearfully*). I think Mrs. Pertwee will be found.

JACK. Do you?

MRS. H. (*with a sob*). I'm sure of it.

JACK. Where?

MRS. H. (*points over her shoulder*). Behind that curtain!

(*Tableau. A pause. The men look rather foolish.* JACK *moves* L. *to writing-table.* QUAYLE *is up* R.)

(*smiling sweetly.*) I acted that *rather* well—didn't I? (*goes up* L. *of table to window,* C.) Come out, Louisa. I've spotted your bonnet, I want to see the rest of you!

(MRS. PERTWEE *slowly emerges, looking very crestfallen.*)

Beautiful—divine! But where's your tambourine?

MRS. P. How dare you?

MRS. H. Very becoming indeed. I suppose this is the latest emotion from Lucile's?

MRS. P. Cruel!

MRS. H. Louisa, I'm afraid you've had a bad time! I'm sorry! Still, if you meddle with other people's property you've got to take the consequences.

So, if I were you, I'd rest content with Mr. Pertwee. And instead of complaining so bitterly that he doesn't understand you—just try and understand *him*. Now go and get into civilized kit, and join Mr. Pertwee at Ealing.

(MRS. P. *with bowed head, exits* L.U.E. MRS. H. *fetches* MR. QUAYLE'S *hat from small table up* L.)

Mr. Quayle will see you upstairs I feel sure. And—— (*very sweetly*) Mr. Quayle, finessing at bridge is a difficult game. At times you get left yourself, at others you land your partner. I wouldn't try it again if I were you. Good-morning! (*hands* MR. QUAYLE *his hat.*)

(QUAYLE, *looking fixedly at* JACK *crosses to door* L.U.E., *and exits.* JACK *simultaneously crosses* R., *his back to audience, glaring at the author of all his troubles.*)

JACK (R.C., *ruefully*). It's a grand slam, Dicky.

MRS. H. (*moves down and gets to below table* C.) Jack, old boy, listen. I'm going to open the door of my aviary and let my birds go free. I've been very careful of their feathers, Jack. They've fed from my hand, and been so gentle, that I hope they'll escape the snare of the fowler. But one bird, Jack, I want to keep, please. The rest may go, but I can't spare him, because—because I love him. (*She rests her head on his shoulder.*)

They embrace very tenderly as the—

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